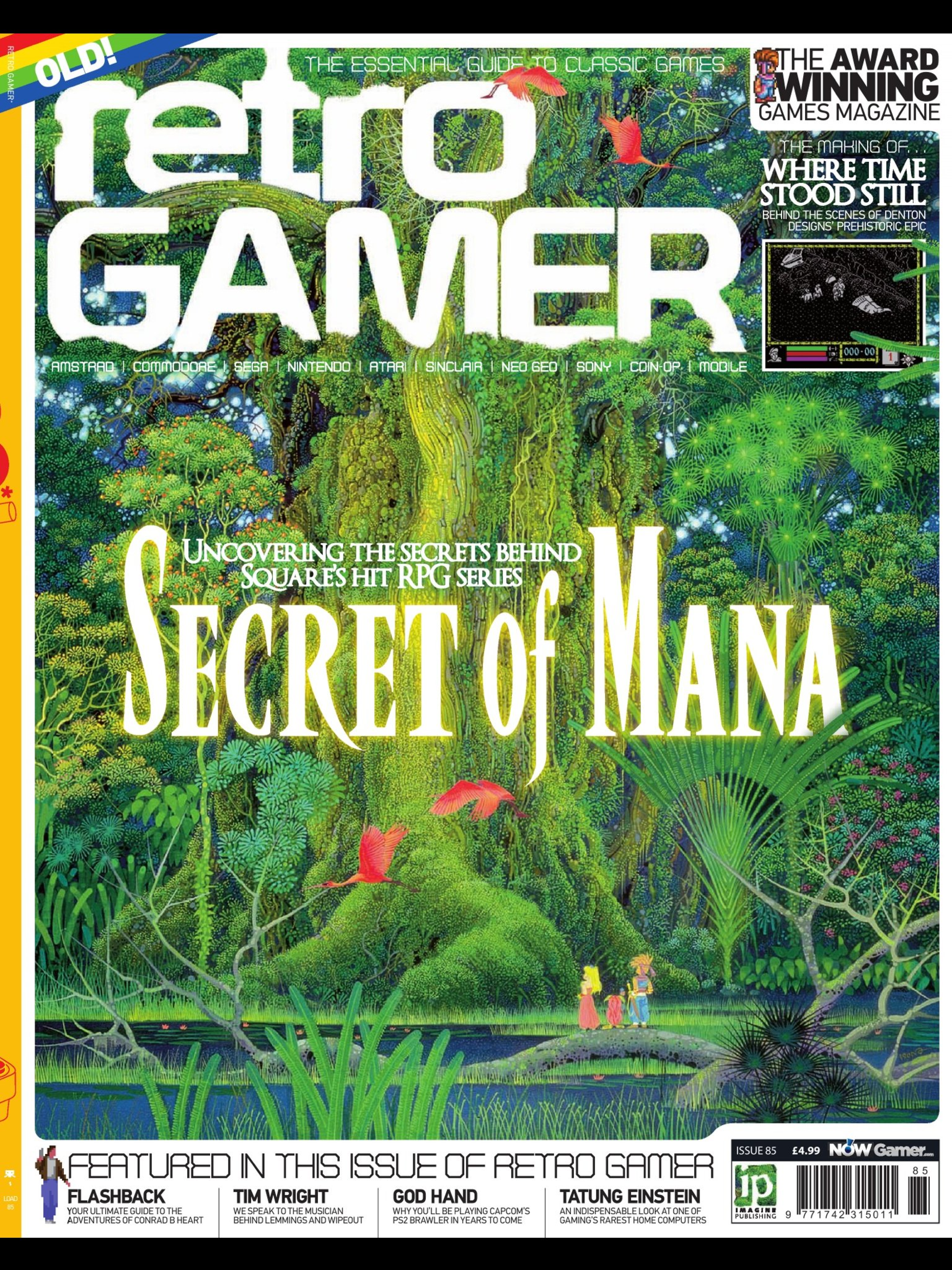

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UNCOVERING THE SECRETS BEHIND SQUARE'S HIT RPG SERIES
SECRET of MANA
FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER
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YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE ADVENTURES OF CONRAD B HEART
TIM WRIGHT
WE SPEAK TO THE MUSICIAN BEHIND LEMMINGS AND WIPEOUT
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE LEMMING?



DARRAN JONES

I'm not a huge fan, so I'm going for the nuke button. There's something satisfying about watching them hold their heads as they burst. Lovely.
Expertise:
Steering the helm of an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Infinity Blade
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

It's a dull selection, but for me the best Lemming has to be the Blocker. Not only is it the most useful, but there's also the sacrificial nature of it.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Vanquish
Favourite game of all time:
Vanquish



JASON KELK

The little guys with pickaxes who dig diagonally. I've always liked the cute way they tunnel.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew Herod
Currently playing:
Hunter's Moon (C64)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

The original game is the one that hooked me and that I still return to (usually on the Mac or PC). A simple concept, well executed, like all the best games.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Reckless Racing HD
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

The Builders. My games of *Lemmings* tend to be chock full of staircases reaching towards heaven. Classic game.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Call Of Duty: Black Ops
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

My vote goes to the humble, altruistic Blocker. Greater love hath no lemming than this that he lays down his life for his friends. Unless you can dig beneath him and save him too.
Expertise:
Blooting
Currently playing:
Super Scribblenauts
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



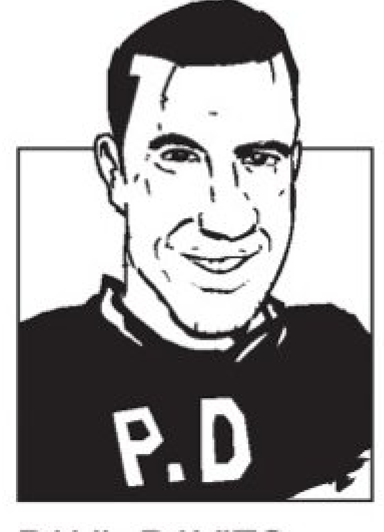
ASHLEY DAY

I love them all equally. Their little green hair swaying in the wind, their Pob-style coveralls… they may be the most lovable characters in videogames. But why do so many of them have to die?
Expertise: The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Gray Matter
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

My favourite is when the little bastards all explode! Oh no! Ahh, hours and hours of fun. Sometimes I even played the game itself.
Expertise: Blowing up rodents
Currently playing:
Bombermole
Favourite game of all time:
Dynamite Headdy



PAUL DAVIES

I liked the Floaters, as they're the most relaxed.
Expertise: Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo: Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls N Ghosts

LOADING...



Hello everyone and welcome to a spanking new 2011. Retro Gamer had a truly fantastic year in 2010 and set a couple of firsts in the industry (as far as making amazing videogame magazines go), so the question we've been asking ourselves is: how on Earth do we top it? The answer really is obvious; we'll just keep doing what we always do, but we'll be doing it much, much better.

That means you can look forward to lots of exciting developments in the coming months, as well as the return of a few old favourites that we'll be digging out and giving a fresh coat of paint to. We've always prided ourselves on doing things differently to other gaming magazines, remaining passionate about games and ensuring that you are always along for the ride. With that in mind we'll be continuing to hang out on the forums, respond to feedback and do whatever we can to make **Retro Gamer** the best damn mag it can possibly be.

There are lots of exciting developments on the way, plenty of brand new articles, exclusive new interviews and much, much more. Basically, if you thought we had a great 2010, just want till you see what we have in store for you this year. You won't be disappointed.

Enjoy the magazine,







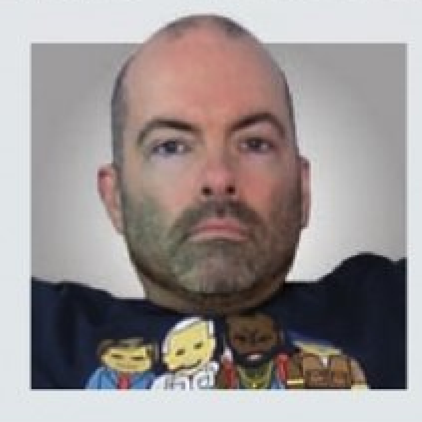
>> Load 85 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

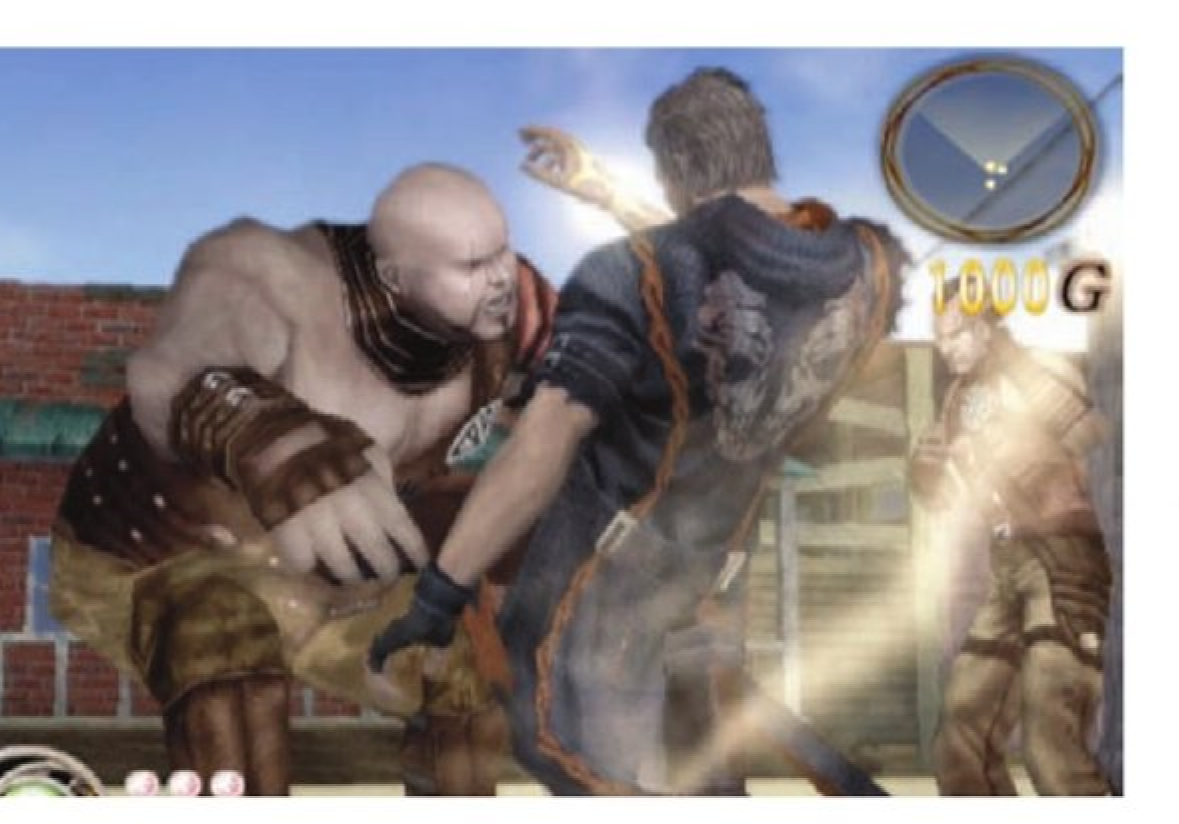
RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





"There will never be anything like it again" Samuel Roberts



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God Hand spelled the end of Capcom's Clover Studio thanks to its poor sales. Samuel Roberts explains why you need it in your collection

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The ultimate guide to one of gaming's best 16-bit adventures





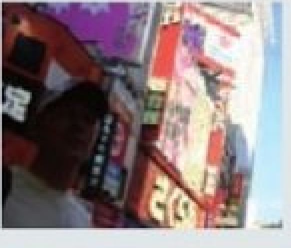
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Let's go! Stuart Hunt charts the history of gaming's most lovable rodents

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Discover how Sonic's first spin-off game came into being

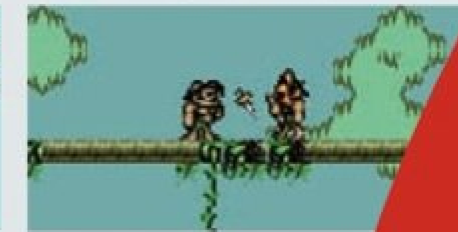




22 TARZAN: LORD OF THE JUNGLE

Matt Gander uncovers an extremely rare Game Gear title. What a pity, then, that it's not actually much cop.





ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





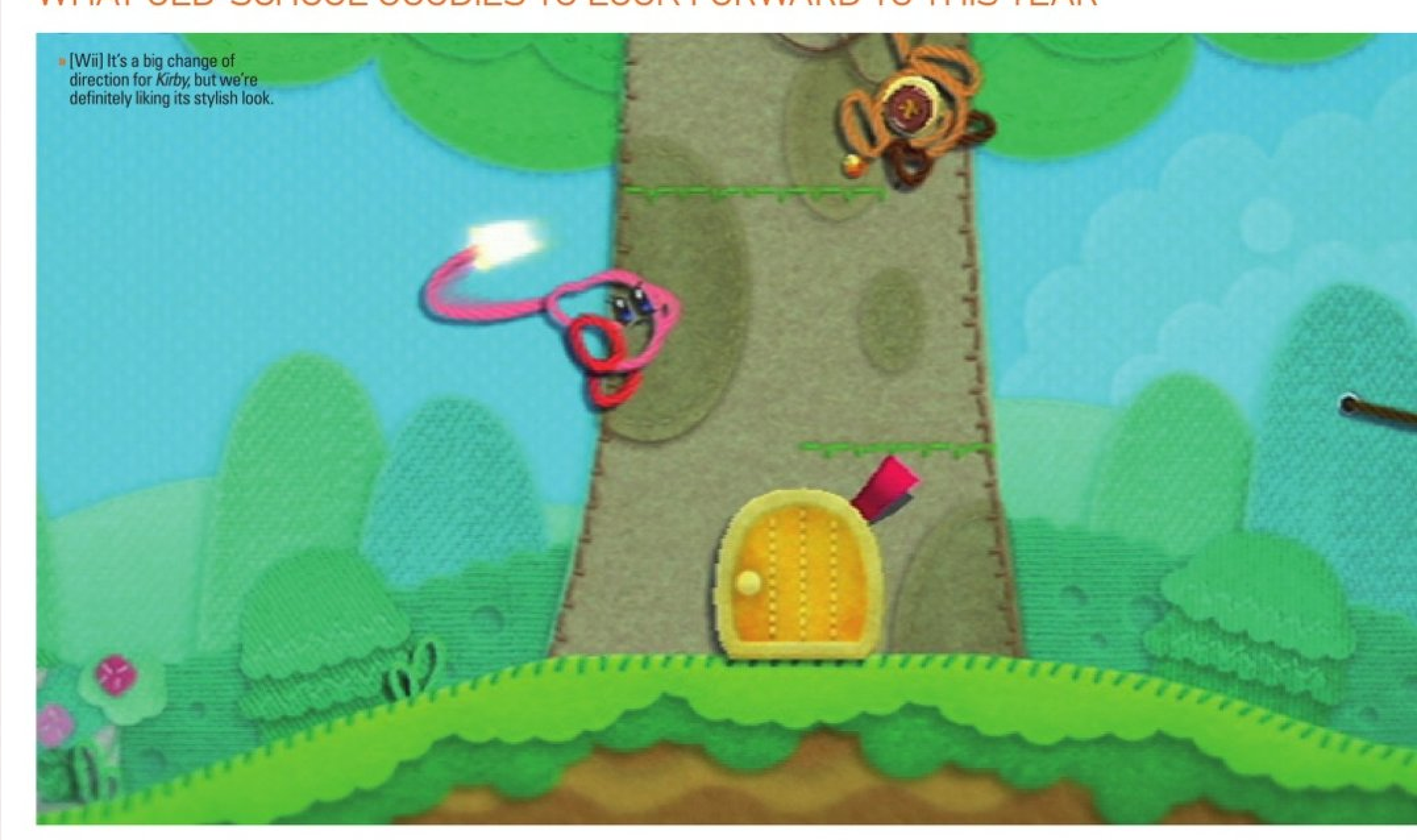
>> It's the beginning of a new year and there's a wealth of exciting new games coming out that are based on classic franchises. If you're a fan of Radiant Silvergun, Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike or Panzer Dragoon then prepare to be very excited. We are!

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RETRO IN 2011

WHAT OLD-SCHOOL GOODIES TO LOOK FORWARD TO THIS YEAR



» [Wii] It's a big change of direction for *Kirby*, but we're definitely liking its stylish look.

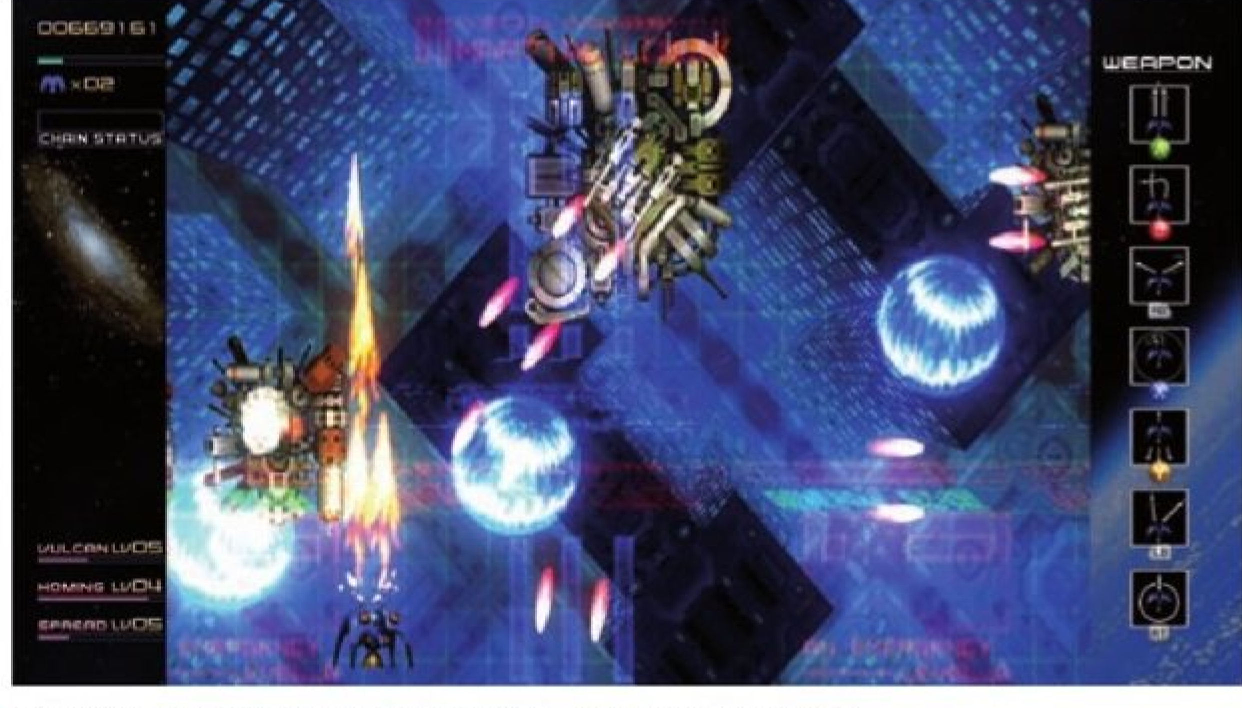
2010 was a pretty good year for retro gaming. Mario celebrated 25 years of being super, Sonic finally starred in a truly excellent 3D adventure, and Konami did the seemingly impossible and made a bloody good 3D *Castlevania* game.

While we always love to look to the past – we're **Retro Gamer**, after all – we've got a firm eye on the future, because it's looking like it's going to be another classic year for retro franchises, with all sorts of titles coming out of the woodwork.

Nintendo's stable of classic characters had a fantastic year in 2010 thanks to *Donkey Kong Country Returns, Super Mario Galaxy 2, Metroid: Other M* and *Super Mario All-Stars*. And yet 2011 is already looking to be another impressive year for the big N thanks to *The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword, Kirby's Epic Yarn* and the piles of returning favourites on the 3DS, which is set to give both retro gaming and handheld gaming a major kick up the backside.

Granted, you could argue that having *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* as a launch title is a little lame, but look at it like this: the 3DS is going to have *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*! The retro loveathon continues with *Pilotwings, Mario Kart, Star Fox 64* and *Kid Icarus* all due to appear on the system later this year. We can't wait.

Nintendo isn't the only publisher with big plans for 2011, with Sega, Konami, Square Enix and many more getting in on the act as well. Being huge Sega fans, we're expecting a lot of *Sonic* announcements next year. The blue hedgehog will be celebrating his 21st birthday, and after the success and return to form of *Sonic 4: Episode I* and *Sonic Colours, Episode II* can't be too far away now. It's not just Sonic who'll



» [XBLA] Treasure's super shooter finally gets officially announced. We can't wait.

The three games we can't wait for

Project Draco

One look at the accompanying piece of art should tell you everything you need to know: *Panzer Dragoon* is back! Admittedly gameplay information is incredibly thin on the ground, but it would appear that you will have the option of raising a dragon and eventually being able to fly it. We've absolutely no idea how Sega is planning to implement the traditional *Panzer Dragoon* controls or if it will even feature them, but on its release date you can guarantee that we'll be standing up in front of our Kinect sensors, arms outstretched and with tears streaming down our faces. Whether they'll be tears of joy or tears of pain remains to be seen, but we're still desperately excited about it.





Radiant Silvergun

There are many reasons to be excited about the incoming release of *Radiant Silvergun*, and it's not just because Darran will be able to flog his Saturn version on eBay. Treasure's shooter is quite simply one of the greatest shmups of all time. From its meticulously designed weapon system to its incredible boss fights, it's an absolute masterclass in vertical shooters, and it's a game that every gamer should experience, if only so they can see what all the fuss is about. It's certainly been a long time coming and is one of Treasure's and Xbox Live Arcade's most requested games, but the long wait is very nearly over.

Kirby's Epic Yarn

We were lucky enough to play this charming little game at last year's R3play. While it's vastly different to past *Kirby* games – you can no longer suck up enemies to use their powers – there's no denying that it's an incredibly cheerful platformer that fans of the pink blob are bound to enjoy. It certainly felt a little easy during the brief play that we had, but the gameplay mechanics are extremely clever, while the visual fidelity is at times astounding. Nintendo's been on a roll with its platformers recently, so we're hoping that Kirby's new game has more in common with *Donkey Kong Country Returns* and *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, and less in common with *Kirby's Air Ride*.



> "2011 is going to be another classic year for retro series"

be returning to our screens, though, as Sega has also revealed *Sega Bass Fishing* and *Space Channel 5 Part 2* for Xbox Live Arcade and PSN, which are part of the next wave of the company's continued effort to resurrect the Dreamcast back catalogue on modern systems. Then, of course, there's the mysterious *Project Draco*, which, based on the videos and artwork that have so far been released, is the latest addition to the *Panzer Dragoon* franchise. We're dreadfully excited about this piece of news, as *Panzer Dragoon* is one of the most underrated franchises around. Even the fact that it's going to be a Kinect game doesn't faze us, as we're confident that Sega will work out how to emulate the lock-on system that made the original Saturn and Xbox games such a joy to play.

If you've already headed to the review section this month, you'll have no doubt noticed that we quite liked Ubisoft's HD update of its PS2 *Prince Of Persia* trilogy. Well, there's more to come both from Ubisoft and Sony. Ubisoft is prepping a *Splinter Cell* trilogy, while Sony will be releasing shiny new versions of *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*. Here's hoping that other publishers take note, as we'd love to see classic Capcom and Sega games, among many others, getting the high-def treatment. Oh, and did we mention that there's a new *Tactics Ogre* and the third part of the *Deus Ex* series to look forward to as well?

While retail looks set to have a very strong year, it's also worth noting that there's a lot of digital goodness to look forward to in the coming months. As previously mentioned, it's only going to be a matter of time before Sega announces the next part of *Sonic 4*, and we wouldn't be surprised if it reveals even more Dreamcast titles very soon. Konami is also getting in on the act and is planning to release a brand new update of *Rush'n Attack* (or *Green Beret*, as it's more commonly known) for both Xbox Live Arcade and PSN. By far the biggest news for us, however, is that in just a few short months we'll be once again playing Treasure's magnificent shmup *Radiant Silvergun*. Legendary in status thanks to its high price tag and the fact that it's a genuinely fantastic shoot-'em-up, we're desperately awaiting its Live Arcade release, if only to see if current gamers love it as much as we do.

We're sure that there's plenty more goodness to come this year, but there's more than enough to look forward to already.



» [Wii] The new *Zelda* is looking very impressive. With this and the 3DS, it's going to be a good year for Nintendo.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> What games are you looking forward to in 2011?



ShadowMan
I guess *Kirby* is the game I am looking forward to most. Even if it's a bit on the easy side, it still looks great and I've always enjoyed past *Kirby* games.

stvd
Hopefully *Deus Ex 3* will be worth the wait, but other than that those choices give me depression!

TheNewMonkey
Sonic 4: Episode II. I really enjoyed *Episode I* while it lasted.

Roo
I'll readily admit that I'm a rabid little fanboy for 2D platformers, so anything of that ilk will be high on the want list. *Epic Yarn* gives me something different to look forward to, though.

felgekarp
From what I saw of it at R3play, *Kirby's Epic Yarn* is one of the finest games I've ever seen, even if it is for kids.

Rinoa
From the list, definitely *Kirby*. I had a go at R3play and absolutely loved it.

Antiriad2097
I'll be happy to give *Radiant Silvergun* a turn. With the Saturn version selling for silly money and emulation of it not quite right, I'll finally have a chance to see what all the fuss has been about. Having said that, it'd best be a budget release.

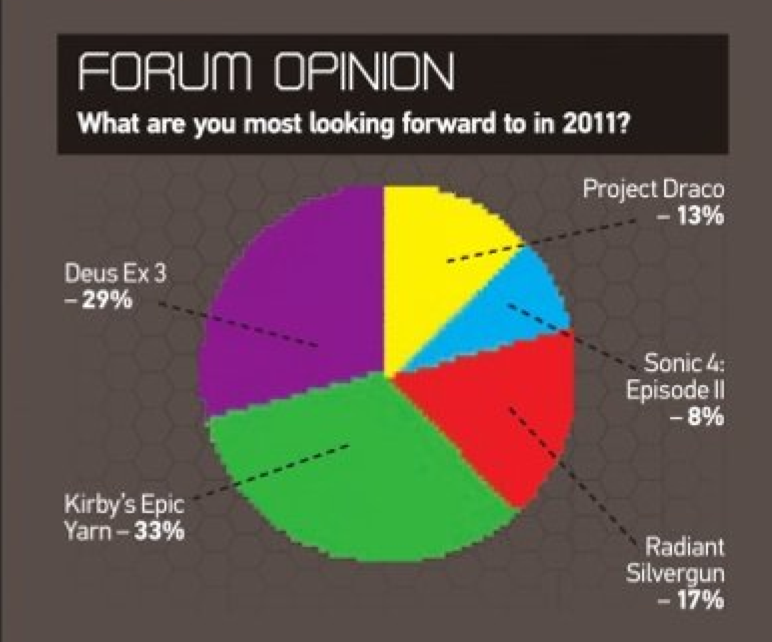
Morkin
Kirby for me. Would've liked it this year, but it's not like I haven't got anything to play!

Nemesis
Even though I do not possess a 360 or PS3 at present, my vote has gone to *Deus Ex 3*. I really liked *Invisible War* on the Xbox, so it'll be interesting to see if it lives up to the hype.

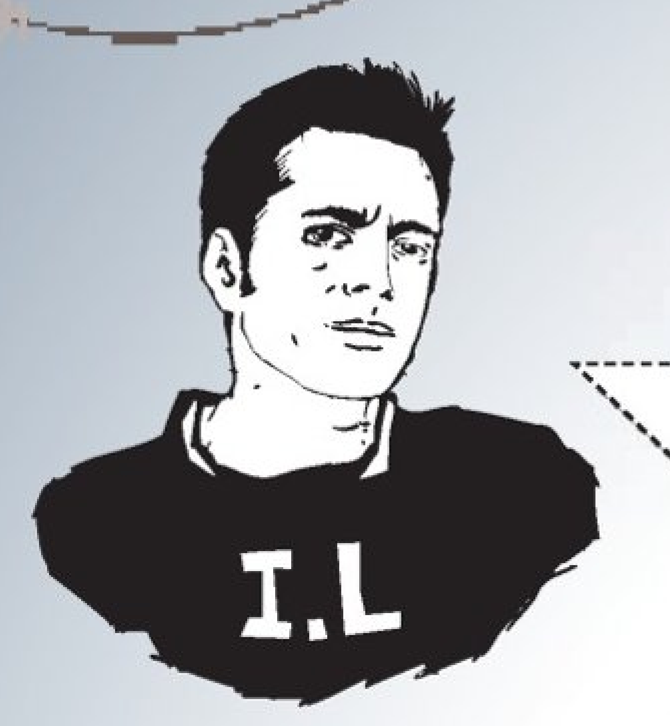
Britnostalgic
Easy, that one: *Deus Ex 3*, as long as it stays true to the original.

FORUM OPINION

What are you most looking forward to in 2011?



Here's the bio…
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Thoughts on R3play

I'm not really that big on conventions, or conferences, or gatherings, or even people. In fact, it's people I dislike more than anything. And that's not out of arrogance, it comes purely from a place of shyness and social awkwardness. I just don't know how to speak to people and always say the wrong things to them.

Anyways, I had been asked by Dave, one of the organisers of R3play, if I would pop down (or rather up; it was in Blackpool) and show my face. Because I was on the telly about seven years ago and play games, I carry the weighty title of 'celebrity gamer'. I can assure you, my life is most uncelebrity like. Apart from the dwarf I employ to wear a bowl of cocaine on his head and the sex parties I indulge in with glamour models and soap stars, my life is quite dull.

If I'm honest, I wasn't sure about making the journey because we've not long had a baby and my weekends are kind of precious at the moment. About a week before the event, Dave sent a panicked email with the subject heading 'HELP!' In it he explained how Gail Porter had had to pull out of the event and they were desperate for someone to host it. Well, when you get a call like that, what can you do? I agreed I'd come down (up) there for a day and say some words into a microphone.

I should possibly add, but only to make me look good, I wasn't getting paid for this. I was getting travel covered and enough to buy me a sandwich, and that was it. I was doing it to help someone out and because it gave me a good excuse to go and have a look round and see what was going on.

I was expecting it to be held in a tiny little room, with a few spoddy blokes leering at a C64, while someone else tried to insert their winkie into an Oric. When I got there, I was blown away. It was a huge room, with tons of awesome equipment there and, yes, a few spoddy blokes, but also *normal people*. And everyone I met, without exception, was a joy. I had so many wonderful conversations, including an unfathomable one about Amstrads. Seriously, this guy totally outgeeked me, and all I could do was stand there with a blank grin and nod while thinking 'I haven't got a clue what he's on about!'

The highlights for me were playing *Space Panic*, lasting 32 seconds on *Steel Battalion* and *not* buying anything from the very sexy display of retro consoles. Good boy Iain, well done.

I did have several people say they were pleased to see me there but would rather have had Gail. I completely understand, although I thought that by offering to flash my bum, I might make up for their disappointment. Seems I got that totally wrong. I don't think I'll ever learn.

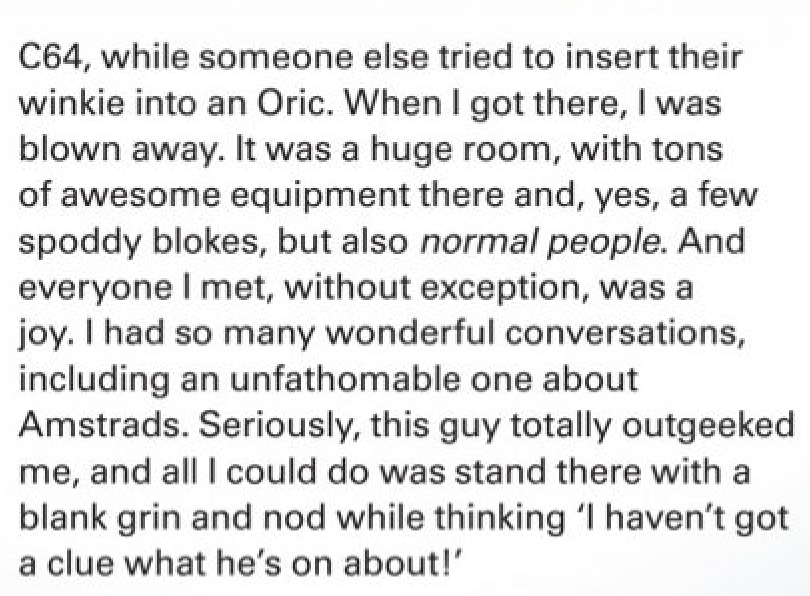


Illustration by **Lee Piper**

This guy totally outgeeked me, and all I could do was stand there with a blank grin





» [PSN] We're not sure what direction Universe will take, but it does appear to have a *LittleBigPlanet* vibe.

CAPCAN

THE JAPANESE PUBLISHER GOES RETRO CRAZY

Fans of Capcom look set for a very good year, as the publisher has plenty of great retro-styled games lined up. After dominating with both *Street Fighter IV* and its follow up *Super Street Fighter IV*, it should come as no surprise to learn that Capcom has plenty more beat-'em-up love on the way. *Marvel Vs Capcom 3* continues to impress and now boasts a roster of over 30 characters, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Online* should appear later on in the year, while there's also a chance that we'll get to play Capcom's crossover title *Street Fighter X Tekken*.

It's not only beat-'em-up fans who are being catered for, though, as a number of other classic franchises will be getting a new lease of life, mainly on the digital platforms. *Mega Man Universe* sees the titular blue hero appearing in a brand new adventure that designer Keiji Inafune promises will "break the mould and challenge the conventional wisdom of what a *Mega Man* game can be." It certainly looks interesting based on its premise, but we can't help but wonder if Capcom would have been better off working on *Mega Man 11*.

Another hero getting resurrected is Sir Arthur. After paying his dues on Apple's iPhone for his past few games, he's now appearing in an online MMO that looks suspiciously like a *Ghosts N Goblins* take on *New Super Mario Bros*. It's looking highly unlikely that it will reach the UK, but we urge you to check out videos as it looks really good fun. Oh and let's not forget the return of Nathan Spencer in *Bionic Commando Rearmed 2*.

Add in continuing rumours that Capcom is planning to reboot the *Resident Evil* series (not to mention the two *Resi* games – *Revelations* and *The Mercenaries* – heading to 3DS) and it would appear that the Japanese-based publisher has a good change of nicking the retro crown from current champions Nintendo. *

* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



While I love the idea of another *Bionic Commando* game, it's the online version of *3rd Strike* that I'm most excited about. It's a truly stunning fighter, one of the best in fact, and its release on PSN and XBLA can only be a good thing.

Stuart



I can't wait for *Marvel Vs. Capcom 3*. Not only am I a big fan, but we've had it in the office recently and it looks bloody brilliant. For me *Tatsunoko Vs. Capcom* was one of last year's biggest surprises, and this looks set to continue the strong resurgence of the series.

David



I'm looking forward to *Street Fighter X Tekken*. *Tekken* always gives a great nostalgic feeling, casting me back to that amazing intro on the PlayStation. But what makes this game more special is that it's going to be based on *SF*'s 2D mechanics. Bring it on.

WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style



Subject No 15
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit

OVER THE LAST few weeks we've been putting a ridiculous amount of time into *Hot Pursuit*. It's a sublime racer that takes the best elements of *Burnout* and marries them to Taito's *Chase H.Q.* Not only that but it has a wonderful online system that lets you constantly stay on top of your friend's high scores. But how would Criterion's game look if it had been released 12 years ago on the SNES? As usual, Trevor Story has the answer.



» If this game had appeared on the SNES we'd have never played anything else.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Counting the days

It's partly because I'm getting old and hopefully because I've been having fun, but 2010 flew by because of so many games being 'much anticipated' (as the mags like to say).

When you break it down, a year is only 12 months, 52 weeks, 365 days. If want to you can section it all off and figure out what you'll probably be doing at various points. This is called organisation. I'm terrible at organisation, but I'm brilliant at keeping an eye on what's coming, especially if it's games I'm looking forward to. I've dreamed away days, weeks, months and lately a year of my life because of this sort of behaviour.

My life is what takes place when I'm not playing, talking about, or expecting new games. I've tried to make it about other things, but this is how it is.

Since *Aviator* for my BBC Micro and the excited sales pitch of my closest friend at the time, through waiting on the postman to deliver an imported Mega Drive (for which I injured myself running into a bollard to greet my friend at whose house it had arrived), *Street Fighter II* for Super Famicom, *Mario 64*, and the rest of my short history that you've heard enough about before now, I've been making little lists, scribbling notes in my diary, updating my phone reminders, fuelling existence with this thrill of the chase.

And the games companies know this about gamers too! Or they did. Nowadays it's getting boring. Microsoft says it'll release *Halo 2* worldwide for Xbox on a specific date and it happens just like clockwork. Yawn! At least Sony continues to honour the old tradition of announcing release dates than putting them back at the eleventh hour, causing guys like you and me to walk under a cloud for a few days before reviving the 'Can't wait for…' conversations with whoever's going to listen.

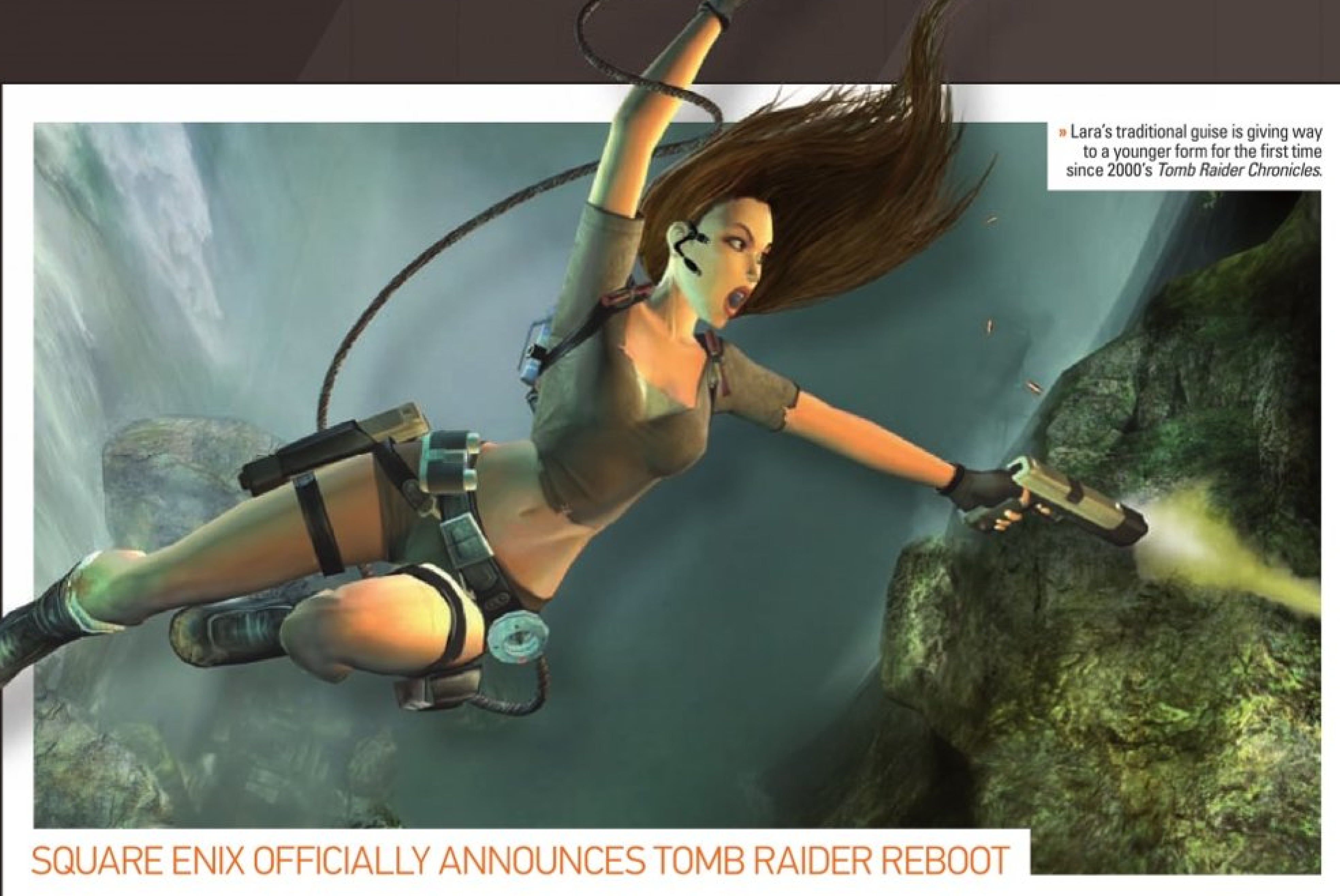
January is just the classic time of year for making lists. Last thing I remember about January 2010 was making a notepad doc with something like February = *Heavy Rain*, March = wife birthday (!), April = *Super Street Fighter IV*, May = *Red Dead Redemption*, June = *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, July = *StarCraft II*, September = *Halo: Reach*, November = *Gran Turismo 5*, oh look at that… Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Just so you know, Nintendo 3DS is out next year. I'm just saying. Haven't been this excited since Game Boy Color. Roll on March… or April… or 'Third Quarter TBC'. Nintendo is the all-time best at keeping us waiting. I've almost given up on *Skyward Sword*. Yeah right, as if.



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

Roll on March. . . or April. . . or 'Third Quarter TBC. . .'



» Lara's traditional guise is giving way to a younger form for the first time since 2000's *Tomb Raider Chronicles*.

SQUARE ENIX OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCES TOMB RAIDER REBOOT

TOMB RAIDER REBOOTED – AGAIN

Speculation of a new *Tomb Raider* for 2011 has been circulating around the internet for a while now. Last year it was reported that a supposed leaked document gave away details that Crystal Dynamics was planning a reboot of the series, and in addition, a few bits of new concept art also surfaced, showing Lara on horseback and some eerie-looking ethereal foes that wouldn't seem out of place terrorising the ashen streets of Silent Hill.

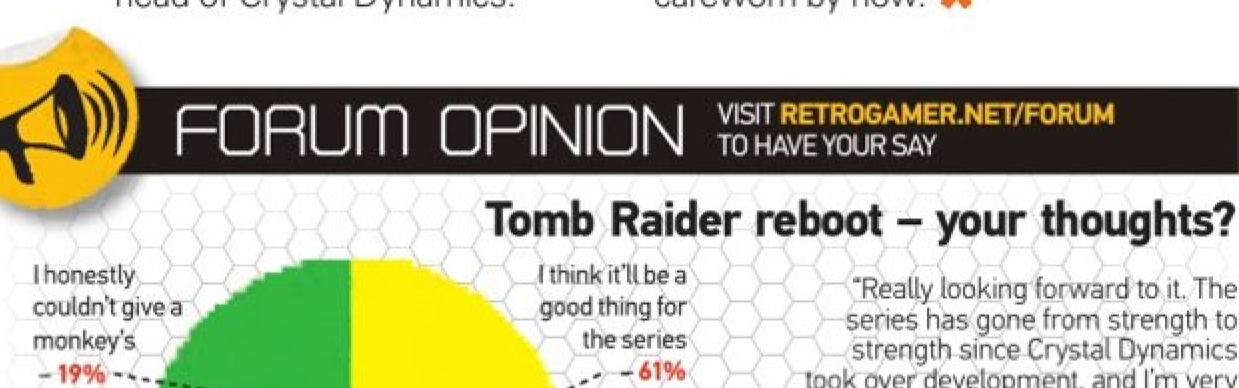
Further stoking the rumour, Eurogamer, quoting an unnamed source, reported in June that Crystal Dynamics was working on a new pillar *Tomb Raider* title alongside the recent, and brilliant, *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light*, which was released on Xbox Live Arcade and PSN in the summer.

Well, the question as to whether or not Lara would make a proper return was finally answered this month, with the official announcement from Square Enix that a new *Tomb Raider* is definitely on its way – no release date as yet, sadly – and will indeed be a reboot.

While info is a bit sparse at the moment, the game is said to be an origin story. Set before the events of the original *Tomb Raider*, it will explain how an inexperienced Lara Croft acquires the skills that helped to make her the legendary adventurer we know her as today. According to Square Enix, the story will see Lara travelling aboard a ship that runs into a spot of inclement weather and leaves the young heiress stranded on an unknown island. Wet behind the ears – in both respects – this particular adventure becomes a bit of a baptism of fire for Lara, as she is left fighting for survival.

"Forget everything you know about *Tomb Raider*," said Darrell Gallagher, head of Crystal Dynamics. "We are exploring things that have never been done before in the game."

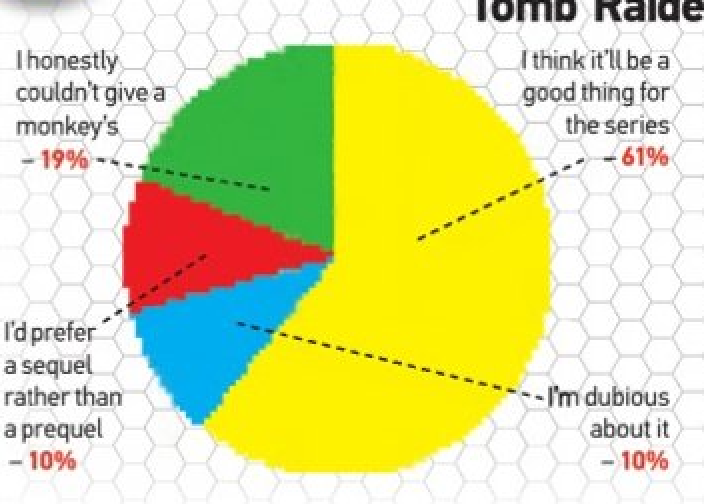
So far Crystal Dynamics has only revealed one image of the new, younger Lara. Exclusively unveiled by US game publication *Game Informer*, it shows a bloodied and mucky Ms Croft standing in front of the crashed passenger liner – a telling sign, perhaps, of how this new game will play out: grittier, edgier and… ahem… filthier. Personally, we enjoyed Crystal Dynamics' *Tomb Raider* games, and we feel it's about time that Lara was given a fresh new look. Let's be honest: those tan shorts and collagen lips of hers must be getting a little careworn by now. *



FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Tomb Raider reboot – your thoughts?



"Really looking forward to it. The series has gone from strength to strength since Crystal Dynamics took over development, and I'm very interested to see what they do with the Lara Croft back story. Might open up a lot of possibilities for future games in the series if they do it right" – **ToxieDogg**

"Wasn't *Legend* supposed to be a reboot? And that was pretty successful, so I see no reason to do it again so soon" – **killbot**



MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» What Chris did next

Chris Hinsley, creator of Wally Week, dropped us a line to tell us a little about what he's been up to recently. Currently the director of technology at Antix Labs, Chris has been busy working on a new portable game service. The Antix Game Player (AGP) allows clients to distribute and share games virally across networks and offline with friends and family. Check out **www.antixlabs.com** for more information.



» Neo Geo Station launches

To celebrate the console's 20th birthday, SNK has launched Neo Geo Station in Japan and the US, an emulation service for the PS3 and PSP specifically geared towards Neo Geo gaming. It currently includes 11 early titles, including *Fatal Fury, Art Of Fighting, Metal Slug, KOF '94* and *Samurai Shodown*, and each is priced at a staggering $8.99 (£6) for the PS3 versions and $6.99 (£4.50) for the PSP.



» Irem announces new collection

With the likes of *R-Type* and *Vigilante* on its books, Irem led the way in offering challenging arcade action. Fans will be pleased to learn that it has teamed up with DotEmu to release its first compilation since the obscure PlayStation release *Irem Arcade Classics*. Featuring 18 titles, including *Hammerin' Harry, R-Type Leo* and *Vigilante*, it costs £9.99 and can be downloaded from **www.irem-arcade-hits.com**.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO...

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Arcade parts coat hanger

- **RRP:** £35
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Compile a list of the most boring things in the universe and sitting just above the entire broadcasting schedule of ITV2 you'll find coat hangers. Well, it looks their unexciting stature is set to change dramatically. Retro GT has recently been extending its product range from awesome retro gaming T-shirts and bus pass holders to other retro merch as well. Last month it was an external hard drive spliced with a NES cartridge that caught our attention, this month it's these cool-looking coat hangers. Comprised entirely of arcade controller parts, we think it would look great and add colour to any dingy cloakroom. Even better than that, they even support up to four players too.

Mario Bros. figurines

- **RRP:** $19.99 (Set of six)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

You'll never guess what we were thinking the other day while watching reality television and being amazed at how fresh and interesting it still feel after so many golden years. It was that this world sorely needs six more *Mario Bros.* figures in it to feel 0.6 per cent more excellent. Well, surfing the internet that night we spotted this six-pack on **www.thinkgeek.com**. Don't worry, we sent them a gushing email praising them for their actions.

Guitar controller roadie bags

- **RRP:** $89.99
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



If we're honest, even though they can hold two axes (that's rock speak for guitar) we're not surprised these bags for plastic novelty gaming guitars have had their prices slashed recently (they were $99.99). It's hardly likely that you'll get that attached to faux guitars that you'll want to ferry one, let alone two, around with you – unless of course you have some bizarre anxiety to peripheral germs, in which case you simply cannot put a price on this kind of piece of mind.

FLYNN'S ARCADE

Flynn's Arcade T-shirt

- **RRP:** £19
- **Buy it from:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

Even though it's a movie about videogames (a turbulent relationship at the best of times) *Tron* is an undeniable sci-fi classic. It was one of the first films to heavily feature CGI effects, as well as also show men with serious faces wearing neon spandex. With the sequel now hitting cinemas, there's no better time to jump on a zeitgeist by wearing this natty T-shirt.

Limited Edition Pac-Man Moleskin Notebooks

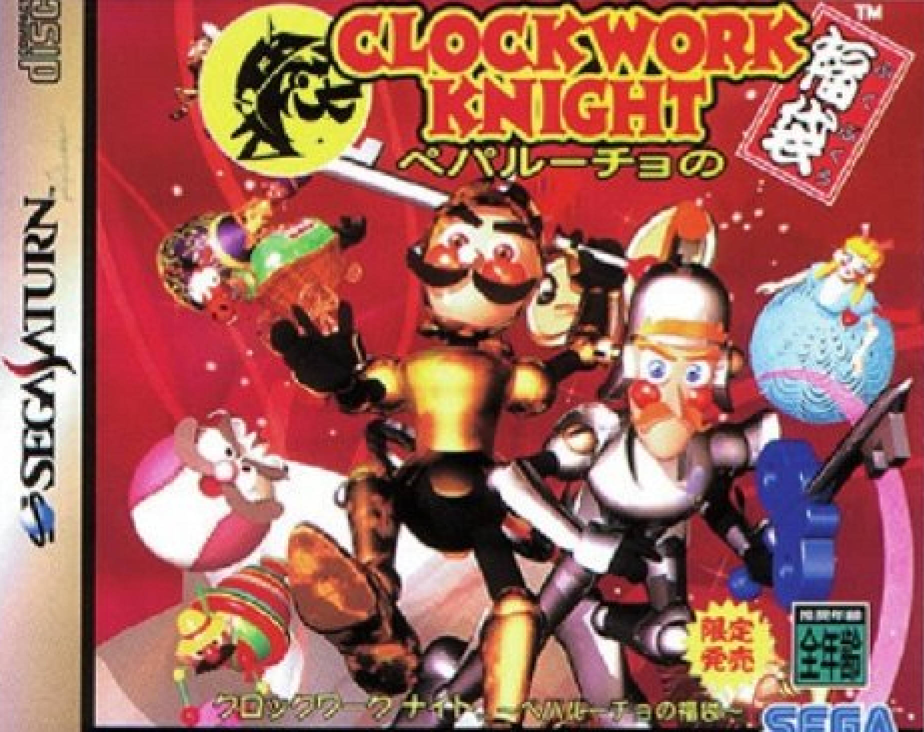
■ **RRP:** $14.95 - $29.95 (Five styles to choose from)

■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

If you can think of a better and more appropriate way to celebrate *Pac-Man* hitting 30 than buying a moleskin notebook we'll eat the entire contents of Darran's bottom drawer. 30 tends to be a milestone year; one that many people re-evaluate the direction their life is heading, and, if they're unhappy about it, often do nothing. Armed with this notebook, though, you can begin a new direction in life working in Chicago as a pet detective.







Clockwork Knight Pepperouchaus Adventure

■ **RRP:** £24.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.genkivideogames.com

We're frequently impressed by Genki Games' great selection of import gaming treasures. This month they have a copy of the Japanese *Clockwork Knight* double pack on their books. Containing the two excellent Saturn platformers, as well as some supplementary bits like additional mini-games and animations, it's a great little purchase for collectors of Sega, Saturn, platform, or funny-titled games.

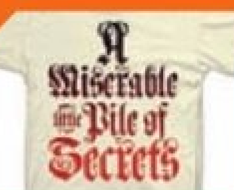
Tomytronic Thundering Turbo

■ **RRP:** £9.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.rewind-gaming.co.uk

It's certainly been a few years since we've seen or played with one of these. Taking the concept of binoculars, redesigning them to look like plastic spaceships, and then punching them into the realm of 3D interactive entertainment, the Tomytronic series felt like the future of LCD gaming at one stage. Who could blame Nintendo for taking the idea to its natural next step with the Virtual Boy?

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 A Miserable Little Pile Of Secrets T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Buy it from:** meatbun.us/store/

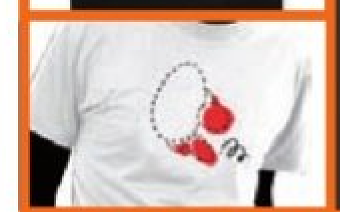


02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



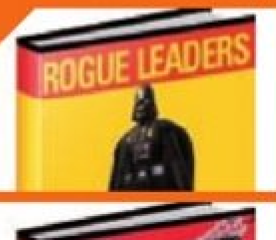
03 Sonic Power-ups
■ **RRP:** $14.95 (approx £10)
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

04 Coexist T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Mega Drive Card Holder
■ **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
■ **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
■ **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com

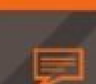


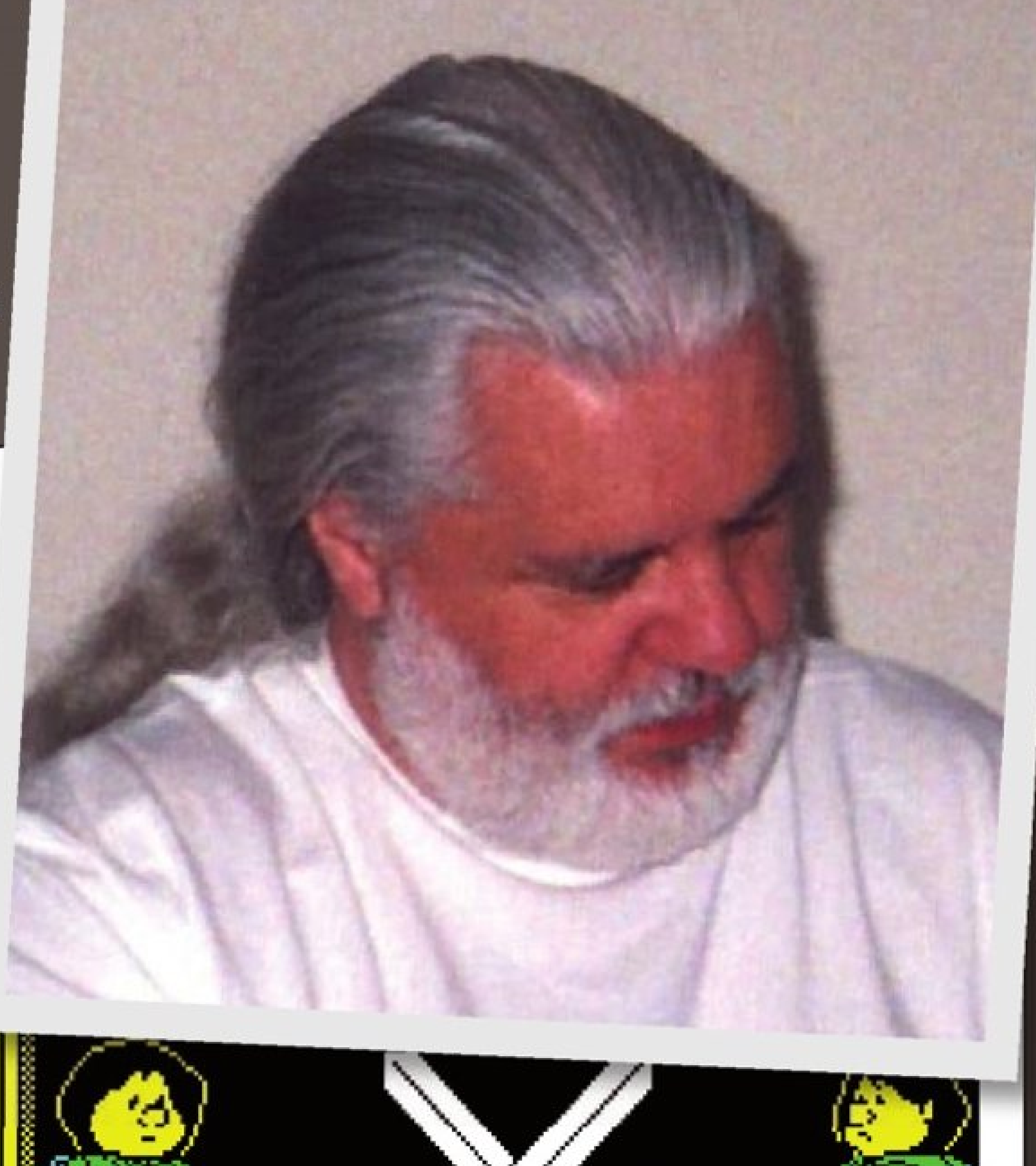
02 Grow Your Own Moai Statue (aka DOH)
■ **RRP:** $5.99 (£4)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com





*A MOMENT WITH...

John Wilson

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes met John Wilson, the founder of Zenobi Software

Who is John Wilson?

Preferring to be known as the Rochdale Balrog, former aircraft electrician John Wilson started Zenobi when he was 40 years old and unemployed. It led to many Spectrum text adventures, including *Aztec Assault, The Balrog And The Cat* and *From Out Of A Dark Night Sky.*

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
It depends upon whether you are asking about games I have written personally or ones that I have published by others. If the latter then I can do no more than recommend *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* by Essential Myth for no other reason than it is a well-written, well-constructed example of the art. If it is one of mine then I would have to say *The Balrog And The Cat* because once you get into it you just want to finish it and see how things turn out. But my own personal favourites have always been the *Behind Closed Doors* trilogy, if only because they allow the player an insight into how my mind actually functions.

What is your proudest memory?
Actually selling the first ever copy of a game I had written, closely followed by being awarded my first [*Your Sinclair*] Mega-Game accolade.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
The memory constraints, but then that was my own fault as I always wrote my games on a 48k Spectrum.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
To be brutally honest, nobody springs to mind as I never actually thought about it before. However, if pushed then I would have to say the guys responsible for bringing together the Ocean family and producing so many classic games.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
On damp, dark days and with a hint of sadness in the eyes.



» [Atari ST] *Souldrinker* is one of the examples of a Zenobi game that wasn't released on the Spectrum.



Which game do you wish you'd made and why?
The one that is still in my head, because until that is written I still haven't written the perfect adventure.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
None whatsoever. It has been a way of feeding my family and keeping a roof over their head. I am no further up the social ladder and still buy my jeans from Asda.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
Being called 'sanctimonious' when I criticised one software house owner who was selling his games while drawing dole money. That, and the fact that I was constantly criticised by some of my so-called 'peers' for speaking my mind.

And your best?
The sound of the multitude of letters, all containing orders for games, dropping onto my doormat that used to echo through my hallway in the Eighties and Nineties.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
The visit by the man from the local vice squad, who called to investigate a tape compilation I was selling that I had called *Deep Waters*. He seemed to think it was something to do with some pervy watersport. Then there were the knocks on my back door, mostly at meal times, that signalled the arrival of some hopeful author – and, in some cases, his family – bearing a tatty copy of their latest masterpiece. And the time I received 50,000 blank disks that were intended for some duplication firm in Scotland, and the delivery man decided to just dump them on my back path. Imagine my surprise when I returned from the post office to find my way blocked by dozens of cases. The company was most apologetic and quickly organised for them to be picked up. In exchange I received my 500 free of charge and the delivery man got his wrist slapped for dropping them off without them being signed for.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
It has just got bigger, brighter, brasher, and a whole of a lot less personal. *



» [Spectrum] As well as creating his own adventures, John published others' under the Zenobi label.

retrodiary

07 January – 03 February

>> A month of retro events both past and present



7 January 1985
■ Over here son, on me head! Ocean plays a blinder as the football game *Match Day* makes its 8-bit league debut.



7 January 1985
■ Microsphere unveils *Skool Daze* on the Spectrum. The school-based arcade adventure was a huge hit and spawned a sequel.



7 January 1992
■ The UK's first videogaming television show, *GamesMaster*, debuts on Channel 4. Dominik Diamond and Patrick Moore present.



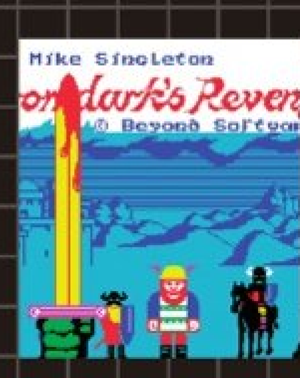
9 January 1985
■ Hewson Consultants releases *Technician Ted* on the Spectrum. The platform game is slick but also incredibly difficult.



12 January 1988
■ Nintendo releases *Safebuster*, a Multi-Screen game in its long-running Game & Watch series.



12 January 1984
■ Sinclair Research announces the release of its latest home micro, the QL. Production problems soon followed…



11 January 1985
■ The follow-up to Mike Singleton's *Lords Of Midnight*, the equally impressive *Doomdark's Revenge*, is released by Beyond.



11 January 1985
■ Elite releases *Airwolf*, a game based on the TV show, on the Spectrum. Damn you first wall of extreme hardness!



18 January 2011
■ Sackboy is back in the American release of *LittleBigPlanet 2* for the PS3. The European release will follow shortly afterwards.



20 January 1966
■ Jon Hare, co-founder of Sensible Software and developer of *Sensible Soccer*, is born.



23 January 1999
■ Sony's PocketStation, a miniature handheld for which you could download content from your PS1, was launched exclusively in Japan.



25 January 2008
■ The seventh in the *Burnout* series, *Burnout Paradise*, is released in Europe on PS3 and Xbox 360.



1 February 1980
■ Science of Cambridge Ltd launches its new home computer kit, the ZX80, for £99. Better dig out that soldering iron…



28 January 1946
■ Chris Curry, one of the co-founders of Acorn Computers, is born.



26 January 2007
■ *Starfox Command*, the first handheld outing for Fox McCloud and friends, is released in Europe on the Nintendo DS.



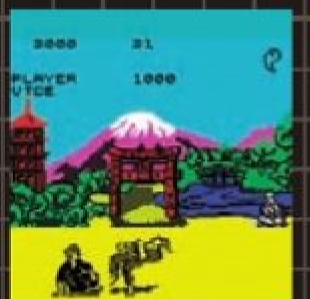
26 January 1987
■ *Dragon Quest 2*, the eagerly awaited sequel to the top-selling NES RPG game finally arrives in Japan.



1 February 1991
■ id Software, the developer behind *Quake* and *Doom*, is founded.



1 February 1995
■ *Kirby's Ghost Trap* arrives in Europe and is the SNES's answer to *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*.



3 February 1987
■ Mastertronic buys out Melbourne House for a reported £1 million. That's a lot of copies of *Starion* and *Exploding Fist*…



03 Feb 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.



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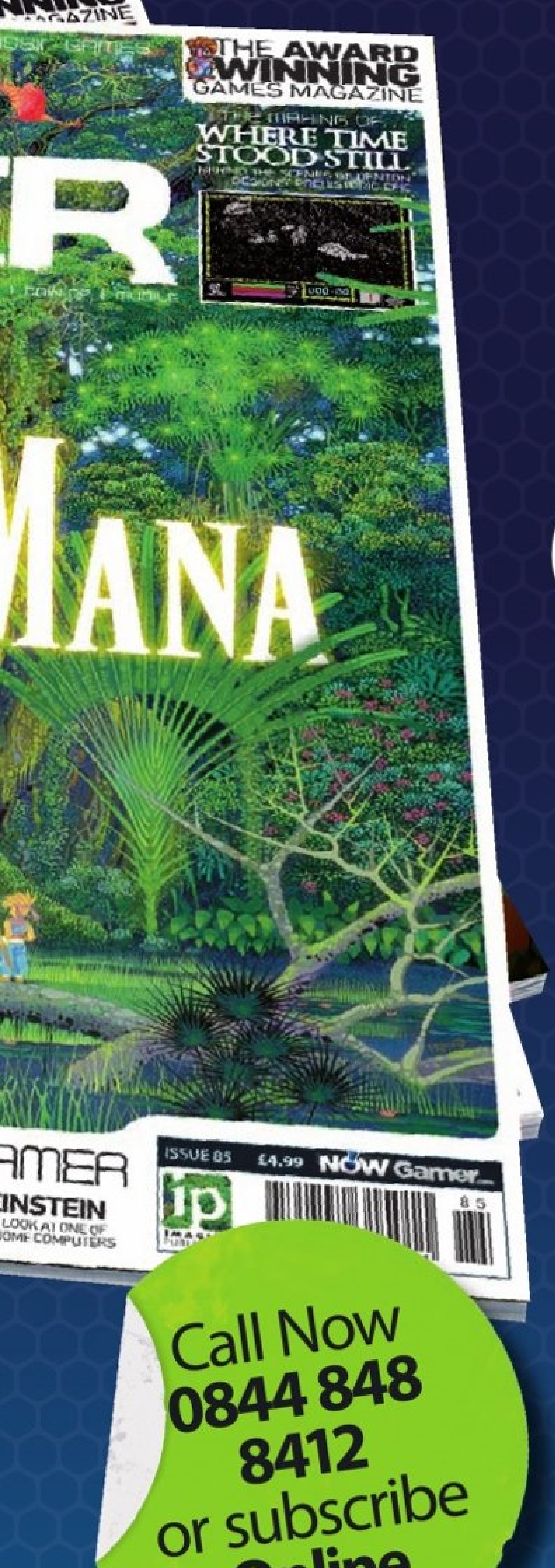
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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

» [C64] With Jan Molby in your team you couldn't possibly lose… or starve.

» [Amiga] Often delayed but finally released, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* was competent but not as much fun as the C64 version.



» [C64] *Flimbo's Quest* was beautiful yet repetitive, difficult yet playable, a classic yet decidedly average.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1989

FEBRUARY 1989 – LFC in score draw, Arnie gets Running, Jacko gets Moonwalking, Gamesweek too weak, Firebird goes Dangerous, System 3 is Flimbo'd while Codemasters gets all CD. Richard Burton's collection of tape-stretched C90s is retired…

In the days when Liverpool Football Club used to win trophies on a regular basis, the rights to a game based on the famous team in red were sought after. So much so that two software houses were claiming rights to an officially endorsed Liverpool game.

Video Images' budget label, Impact, stated that it had signed a deal with Liverpool FC while Grandslam made a similar claim. It emerged that Grandslam thought it had gained the rights to everything under the Liverpool FC banner, but having done business with the management company that looked after the players' interests, it seems it was only allowed to use the players' names and image rights rather than the famous club badge of Liverpool FC, which was what Impact had bought the rights to.

Grandslam also revealed that it had finished its game based on the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, *The Running Man*, in which Arnie takes part in a game show set in a futuristic dystopia. Presumably Grandslam ensured that it had the rights to the entire movie and not just Arnie and his gold jumpsuit…

Another movie undergoing the conversion treatment was *Moonwalker*, the bizarre segmented film starring Michael Jackson. US Gold was developing the game, which would appear in time for Christmas. Those who found it under the Christmas tree were frankly quite disappointed.

After a successful introduction at the Earls Court Toy Fair at the end of January, the press were under the illusion that the Konix Multisystem was about to take the gaming world by storm. The £199 console seemed to have it all, with the Power Chair accessory – yours for a further £199.99 – grabbing everyone's attention.

But were there teething problems with the chair? The Toy Fair demonstration unit was incredibly noisy, likened in one magazine to a powered lawnmower. Konix stated that it was just a prototype problem, as it had metal gearing that would be replaced by nylon gears in the production units.



» [Spectrum] The Spectrum version was playable but nothing special. The C64 conversion stunk like a kipper.

The future of the Konix Multisystem appeared to be not just assured but positively rosy, with an impressive array of hardware inside the console and a roll call of software houses waiting to develop for the system including Ocean, Palace, Electronic Arts, System 3 and US Gold. A £2 million advertising budget for its proposed 1 August release date had also been put aside. Not long to wait, then…

Although not as flamboyant as the Multisystem, the big news from Japan was that Nintendo was planning to release a handheld console. The Game Boy would be available in Japan from around mid-April, with other territories getting official releases later in the year – presumably to see how well the Game Boy sold before releasing it worldwide.

Doubts were cast over whether the monochrome handheld could compete with the impending release of Atari's own portable, the Lynx, which would boast the first ever colour LCD screen. With a September release date pencilled in for the Lynx, confidence was high that it would be a Game Boy beater, even though Nintendo's offering would have a six-month head start.

A magazine casualty this month was Focus Publications' games-oriented weekly magazine, *Computer Gamesweek*. After just 24 issues it merged with Focus's other

FEBRUARY 1989 NEWS



» Before the days of *Guitar Hero*, air guitar was all us non-musical folks had.

14 February saw Salman Rushdie issued with a death sentence by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini in response to the publication of his book, *The Satanic Verses*, which was construed as blasphemous.

The book, which has been banned in several countries, was critically acclaimed and sold well elsewhere. Rushdie was forced into hiding and remained under police protection for nine years.

On 15 February, Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan after nine years of conflict. The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan to support the Communist government, which was clinging to power, as Afghan Islamic rebels, known as the Mujahideen, fought running battles to keep the Soviets out.

International support from the USA and UK helped to keep the Mujahideen in weapons. Afghan warlords fuelled the conflict by introducing religion into the mix, and Arab Muslims responded to the call to arms, including one Osama Bin Laden. Ultimately the Soviets were forced to withdraw.

On a lighter note, the world premiere of *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* took place on 17 February. Excellent.

» Salman Rushdie had to embark on a nine-year game of hide and seek.



» [Spectrum] *Rick Dangerous* was an enjoyable platform game across all systems and breathed new life into a tired genre.

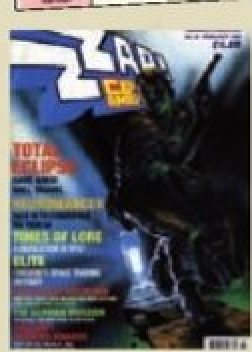


» [C64] Despite some nice graphical touches, *Moonwalker* was an insipid affair.

weekly read, *Popular Computing Weekly*. Apparently this was to give readers better value and not, as most people thought, that *Computer Gamesweek* never really had the sales figures to warrant continuation.

Back in the early Eighties, the only way Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad owners could get 30 individual games on one piece of media was with a double cassette deck and a stack of C90s. However, a Codemasters press release revealed that it was ingeniously creating a 30-game compilation on CD, complete with a connecting cable to your CD player. Loading times for Spectrum and C64 games would be cut down to less than a minute, and all for just £20. It was eventually released in early 1990.

Elite was finally preparing to release the arcade classic *Ghosts 'N Goblins* on the Amiga and ST. With the game being a huge hit on the 8-bit systems and having recently been re-released on budget labels, the conversion to 16-bit was long overdue. Thankfully the wait was worth it, with the conversion mirroring the arcade game in terms of both graphics and difficulty setting. It was marvellous but brick hard.



System 3 was also putting the finishing touches to its latest offering: a colourful, graphically lovely platform game entitled *Flimbo's Quest*. Although it offered nothing original, with the age-old 'rescue your kidnapped girlfriend' scenario, it was a polished product. While the 8-bit versions looked and played well, the 16-bit offerings appeared somewhat jaded.

Firebird signalled the end of the development of its own platform game: *Rick Dangerous*. The lead character had crashed his plane while looking for a lost tribe, then finds their temples and takes their treasure while despatching a few of them. While it sounded old hat, it proved to be a massive hit when released.

Computer & Video Games trawled through the swamp of coding catastrophes to reveal its highest reviews. Coming out on top were *TV Sports Football* (Cinemaware, Amiga), *Baal* (Psyclapse, Atari ST), *Batman* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Cosmic Pirate* (Outlaw, Amiga), *Dream Zone* (Leisuresoft, Amiga), *Demon From The Darkside* (Compass Software, Spectrum) and *Rad Racer* (Nintendo, NES).

THIS MONTH IN...

SINCLAIR USER

SU focused on the development of the scrolling shoot-'em-up *Xenon* by Melbourne House. Jason Cowling of MC Lothlorien – it of the war strategy games – was the main coder, and it was his first major project at the ripe old age of 17. The final result was excellent.



ST/AMIGA FORMAT

Prolific games coder Steve Bak was interviewed this month, letting rip about the software industry. He said: "I work an 80-hour week, drink coffee and Coke constantly, smoke 50 cigarettes a day and get drunk every night. Not ideal for a diabetic on insulin." Nice.



ZZAP!

The Amiga conversion of *Elite* was finally released. Naturally, it had super-smooth crisp 3D graphics as well as the usual abundance of planets, trading elements and pirates to negotiate. *Zzap!* loved it, giving it Gold Medal status and a near-perfect 98% overall.



CHARTS

FEB 1989

AMSTRAD

1. Last Ninja 2 (System 3)
2. Joe Blade 2 (Players)
3. Bomb Jack (Encore)
4. Kik Start 2 (Mastertronic)
5. Advanced Pinball Simulator (Codemasters)

COMMODORE 64

1. RoboCop (Ocean)
2. After Burner (Activision)
3. Double Dragon (Melbourne House)
4. Operation Wolf (Ocean)
5. International Rugby Simulator (Codemasters)

AMIGA

1. Elite (Firebird)
2. Double Dragon (Melbourne House)
3. Pac-Mania (Grandslam)
4. Lombard RAC Rally (Mandarin)
5. OutRun (US Gold)

MUSIC

1. Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart (Marc Almond featuring Gene Pitney)
2. Belfast Child (Simple Minds)
3. Love Changes Everything (Michael Ball)
4. The Living Years (Mike & The Mechanics)
5. Love Train (Holly Johnson)





» [Amiga] You're a chef chasing escaped ingredients across the world. Sounds awful but played rather well.

CHARTS

AUG 1993

MEGA DRIVE

1. Flashback (US Gold/Delphine)
2. Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
3. Streets Of Rage 2 (Sega)
4. Ecco The Dolphin (Sega)
5. Global Gladiators (Virgin)

» [SNES] A refreshingly original fighting game that packed a good right-hander despite its cutesy appearance.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1993

AUGUST 1993 – Mega Man takes the fifth, Sonic's balls go spinning, Atari fires up the Jag, Street Fighter movie announced while Clay Fighter takes on the beat-'em-ups. Richard Burton creates a life-sized model of Chun-Li out of Play-Doh…

Impact Magazines' *Sega Master Force* and *Sega Force Mega* made their newsstand debuts after their former combined form, *Sega Force*, ended its run. Splitting *Sega Force* into two entities may have seemed like a great idea and good commercial sense, but the two new magazines both managed a paltry six-issue run before being prematurely shut down. It appeared that Impact Magazines was having problems…

Coming soon from Mindscape exclusively on the SNES was *Out To Lunch*, a bizarre arcade adventure featuring Pierre Le Chef. The little French cook may be world-renowned but has managed to let his ingredients escape. Your task is to track them down across several countries, and capture your foodstuffs while avoiding baddies such as listeria, salmonella and his arch nemesis: the Chef Noir. It was later converted to the Amiga and CD32 and did very well on both systems on the back of a successful SNES release.

Capcom was continuing unabated with its *Mega Man* franchise, with the latest game available on import, having been released in Japan in December. *Mega Man 5* followed the formula of previous outings both graphically and in gameplay terms, with our hero running and shooting his way through each platform stage, resulting in a battle with a Robot Master boss at the end of each level.

The game was fine but lacked originality, as little had changed since the first game except for a new crop of monsters to defeat. That didn't stop Capcom from pulling in a bumper crop of cash once again, though. So much so that the development of *Mega Man 6* was announced shortly after the fifth release. The UK would eventually get *Mega Man 5* in November. Best stick with *Mega Man 2*, in our opinion.

Big news for Mega Drive and *Sonic* fans was that the blue spiny one was to appear in a new game, although it would be a departure from the tried-and-tested platform games to which we'd grown accustomed. *Sonic Spinball* would see Sonic being used as the ball in four huge levels of fast-paced pinball, similar in style to the Casino Night Zone from the original *Sonic*. Dr Robotnik is doing his utmost to turn the fluffy inhabitants of the Green Hill Zone into robots thanks to his Veg-O-Fortress, with added protection from its pinball defence system. Naturally, Sonic comes to the rescue.

While certainly not anywhere near the class of *Sonic* and *Sonic 2* and appearing – to the cynical, at least – to be a cash-in on the *Sonic* name, *Sonic Spinball* was an entertaining addition to the series without having the ability to blow your socks off. Sega Game Gear owners were belatedly given their conversion in September 1994, with Master System owners waiting until 1995.



» [Master System] *Sonic Chaos* was a Master System and Game Gear exclusive. It was also impressive on both systems.

» [SNES] Escape a sinking liner in the style of *The Poseidon Adventure*. There are titled rooms but no Shelley Winters…





SNES

1. Super Star Wars (JVC)
2. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
3. The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt (Ocean)
4. Buster Busts Loose (Konami)
5. NHLPA Hockey (Electronic Arts)

COMMODORE 64

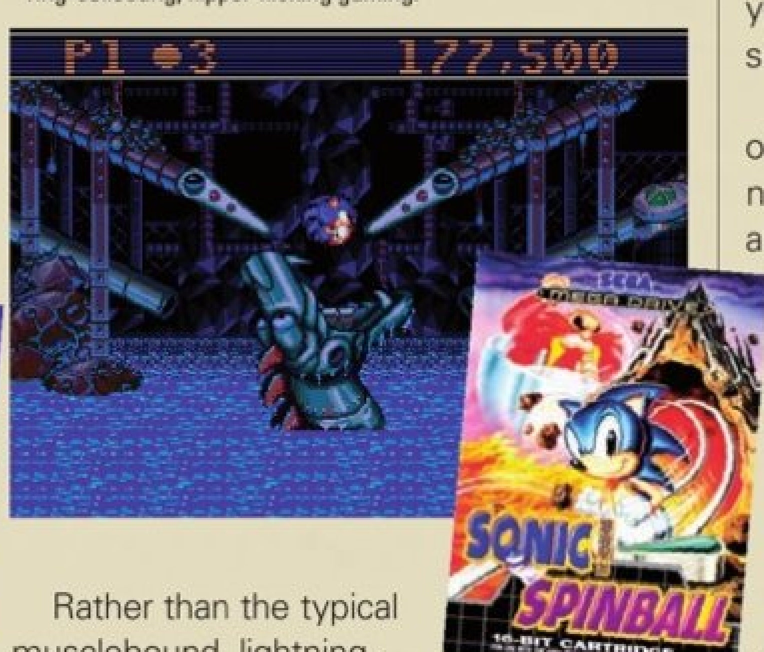
1. Street Fighter II (US Gold)
2. Terminator 2 (Hit Squad)
3. Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk (Codemasters)
4. Street Fighter (Kixx)
5. HeroQuest (GBH)

MUSIC

1. Living On My Own (Freddie Mercury)
2. Mr Vain (Culture Beat)
3. The Key: The Secret (Urban Cookie Collective)
4. It Keeps Rainin' (Tears From My Eyes) (Bitty McLean)
5. Pray (Take That)



» [NES] *Mega Man 5* was good fun, but the lack of originality was worrying. New Robot Masters don't count either…



» [Mega Drive] Sonic becomes a pinball in four huge levels of ring-collecting, flipper-flicking gaming.

Sega still hadn't finished with *Sonic* or your wallets, with news that a Game Gear and Master System release entitled *Sonic Chaos* would also be coming soon. Returning to the platform style of old, the threadbare story of Robotnik, world domination and a quest for the elusive Chaos Emeralds in order to save the day never dared to be original. However, *Sonic Chaos* was a welcome return to form, with the Game Gear version particularly standing out.

Rumblings from the gaming press surrounding Atari's latest console creation suggested that it would be available to buy by the end of the year. This seemed to be confirmed by Atari when it revealed that the Jaguar would be hitting limited retail outlets in major markets around November, with a national release across America early in 1994.

Excitement was building around the Jaguar, with the team behind the ill-fated Konix Multisystem, John Mathieson and Martin Brennan of Flare Technology, developing the console.

The pair decided to shut down Flare and start a new company funded by Atari, ingeniously called Flare II, concentrating its efforts on the new console, which was marketed as the first 64-bit gaming console… but would it tempt new gamers and existing console owners away from their machines in sufficient numbers to be a success?

With software houses jumping on the *Street Fighter* bandwagon by producing very similar games with very similar characters, Interplay decided to try something a bit different and produced *Clay Fighter* for the SNES.

Rather than the typical musclebound, lightning-bolt-flicking superhumans that fighting games tended to feature, *Clay Fighter* had combatants moulded from clay. Just some of the bizarre characters included Bad Mr Frosty, a snowman; Blue Suede Goo, a quiff-flicking Elvis impersonator; and Taffy, a super-stretchy piece of candy.

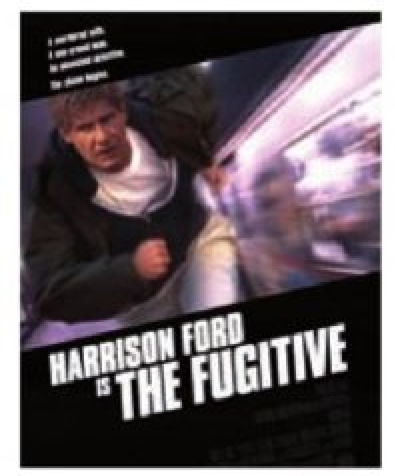
Potentially it could have been a complete disaster, but the Interplay coders produced an addictive, quirky fighting game that was extremely playable. Reviewers loved it and a Mega Drive conversion was released a year later, with a further two sequels in subsequent years.

There was much rejoicing from fans of the all-conquering *Street Fighter*, with news that a movie was to be produced and would star all 12 of the main characters. No one had been cast at that time, but after the debacle of other videogame-based movies such as *Super Mario Bros*, it was probably best not to get your hopes up…

The good, bad and downright unplayable were reviewed and rated throughout the gaming press, with *Super Play* deciding that *Super Turrican* (Seika), *Bubsy The Bobcat* (Accolade), *Striker* (Elite), *Shadowrun* (Data East), *Septentrion* (Human Entertainment) and *Dracula Kid* (Naxat) were the best SNES releases of the month.

Elsewhere, *Amiga Force* gave a big thumbs-up to *Syndicate* (Electronic Arts), *Gunship* (MicroProse), *Yo Joe!* (Hudson Soft), *War In The Gulf* (Empire), *Global Gladiators* (Virgin), *Dune II* (Virgin) and *Boston Bomb Club* (Daze).

AUGUST 1993 NEWS



» A one-armed man, a dam, Tommy Lee Jones pursuing Harrison Ford – it can only be *The Fugitive*.



There was plenty of movie news this month, beginning with the world premiere of *The Fugitive* on 6 August. The remake of the Sixties television series starred Harrison Ford as Dr Richard Kimble and Tommy Lee Jones as the chasing Deputy Marshal Sam Gerard.

Wrongly accused of murdering his wife, Kimble is arrested and sentenced to death. On the way to prison his transport is involved in a crash, so he escapes and goes on the run while trying to track down the murderer, starting with a search for a one-armed man…

The movie was a great action thriller, with Jones receiving a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his performance. One performance that was mesmerisingly bad was the stunt dummy that was thrown off the dam in place of Ford. Love those bendy legs…

27 August saw the UK release of *In The Line Of Fire*, starring Clint Eastwood as Frank Horrigan, an ageing Secret Service agent pitting his wits against John Malkovich, who plans to assassinate the President. Having already lost one president on his watch, Horrigan really doesn't want to lose another, with the grizzled old agent fighting a few personal demons in the process.

THIS MONTH IN…

SUPER PLAY



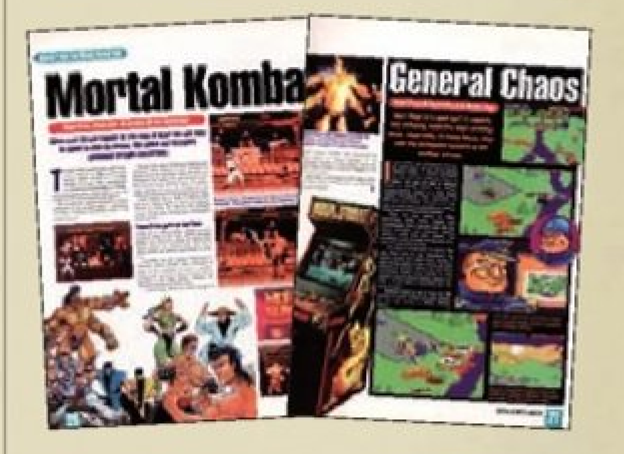
Super Play had an interesting interview with the general manager of Konami's R&D department, Kuniaki Kinoshita. When questioned about Nintendo's elusive CD-ROM attachment, he stated that Konami would be producing games for it… should it be released.



SEGA FORCE MEGA



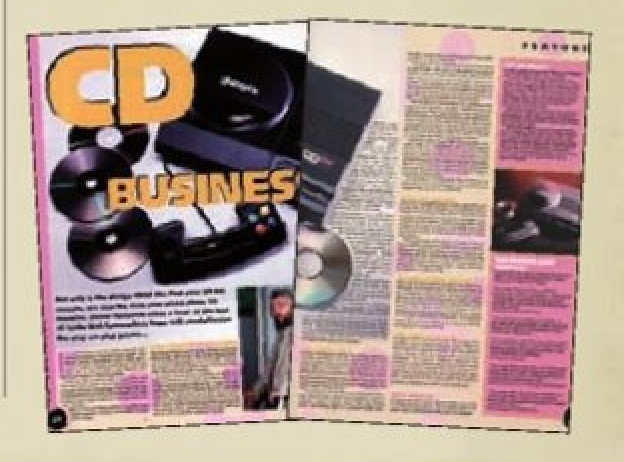
A preview of the Mega Drive version of *Mortal Kombat* featured, highlighting the furore over the Fatalities and splashes of blood. With parents dismayed that such a game should exist, this would naturally ensure that every kid wanted a copy.



THE ONE AMIGA



The first ever 32-bit console, the Amiga CD32, was here, and *The One* gave it a once-over before its launch. Many software developers considered it to be a sure-fire hit, and it might well have been had Commodore International not gone bankrupt in April 1994.





Tarzan: Lord Of The Jungle

I'M A CELEBRITY, GET ME OUT OF HERE!

#33

» GAME GEAR
» EUROCOM
» 1994

***Tarzan: Lord Of The Jungle* is a curious little platformer for a number of reasons. And that number is three. First, the boxart doesn't exactly match the artwork in the game – the front cover is a stunning hand-drawn image, packed full of detail, showing Tarzan as ferocious ape-man with rage in his eyes, clutching a dagger with anger. However, pop the cartridge into the Game Gear, and you're presented with a Tarzan that looks like he has stepped off the set of a Saturday morning cartoon, complete with a cheesy grin and a chin bigger than Desperate Dan.**

Second, it appears to be a straight conversion of the Game Boy version, only with the graphics coloured in. This gives the game a muted look with dull backdrops and pixelated enemies, and a HUD that looks like it has been made out of Lego. I struggle to think of another Game Gear game that looks anywhere near as bad as this. I'm not saying that Game Boy games are ugly, but this wasn't a very good-looking game to start with.

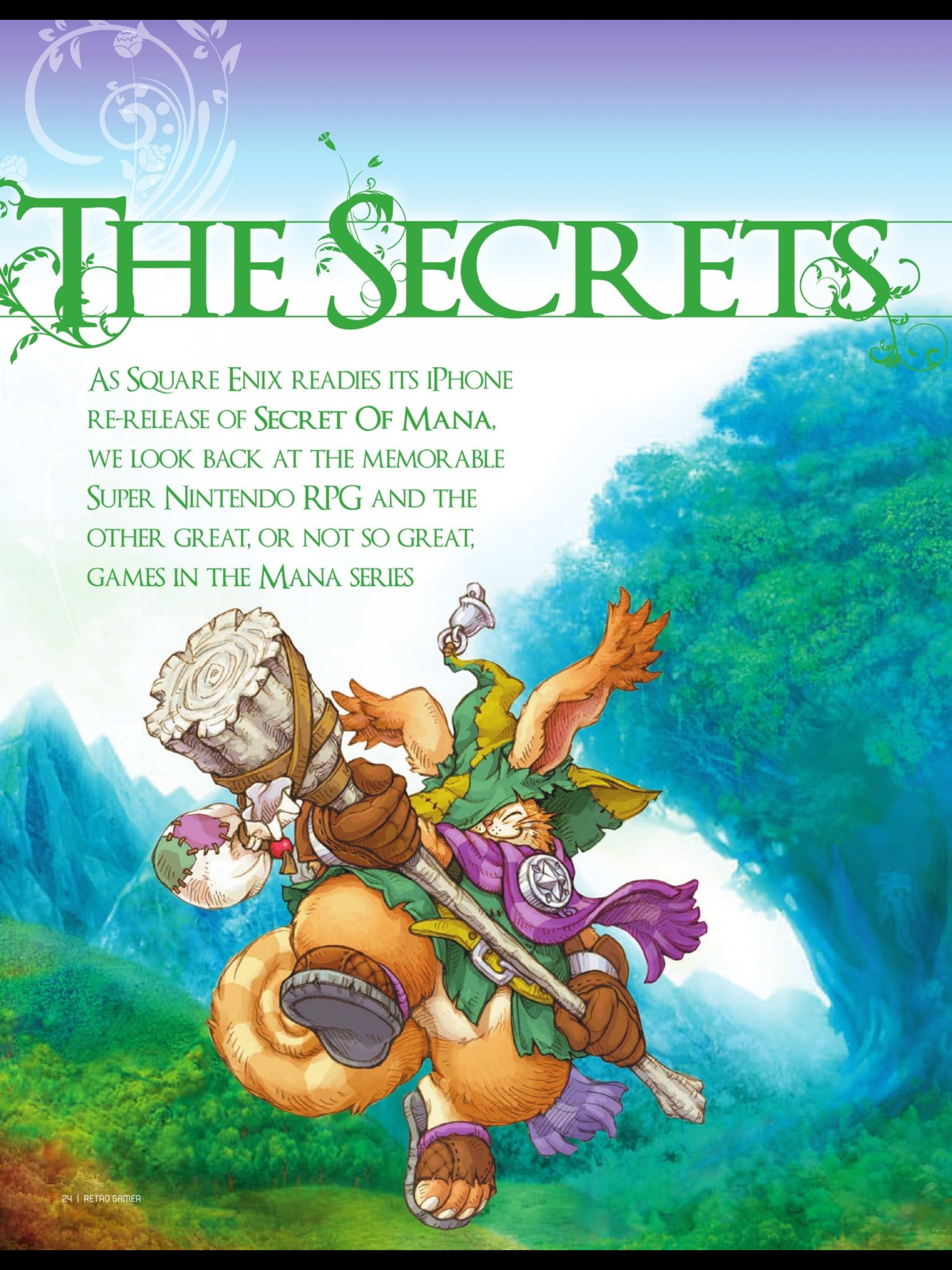
Third and finally the Game Gear version is extraordinarily rare – by my reckoning only two copies have appeared on eBay this year so far – whereas the Game Boy version is easy to find.

So how does it play? Well, it was one of the first games to be developed by Eurocom – who mostly developed licensed titles – and as such it does have a 'my first attempt at a platform game' feel to it with stodgy controls and a general lack of polish.

It's not all bad, though. The levels are large enough to encourage exploration, Tarzan can take a fair few hits before snuffing it, plus you can swing on vines, which has to be a good thing. I'm also quite fond of the sound effect that occurs when you kill an enemy. I'm clutching at straws here, if you haven't gathered.

Although rare, this is such an unheard-of game that it would seem that only dedicated Game Gear collectors know about its existence. Upon playing it for a couple of hours I can't really think of a reason why it shouldn't be kept that way.


RETROBATE PROFILE
» NAME: MATT GANDER
» JOINED: 18 AUGUST 2008
» LOCATION: BRIGHTON
» OCCUPATION: BINGO CALLER
» FAVE GAME SYSTEM: GAME GEAR



The Secrets

As Square Enix readies its iPhone re-release of **Secret Of Mana**, we look back at the memorable Super Nintendo RPG and the other great, or not so great, games in the Mana series

OF MANA



Mystic Quest

For such a highly regarded RPG franchise, the *Mana* series hardly had the most auspicious of beginnings. In fact, it didn't even carry the *Mana* name. First released in Japan as *Seiken Densetsu: Final Fantasy Gaiden* in 1991, the Game Boy title literally translates as *Legend Of The Holy Sword: A Final Fantasy Side Story* and was clearly intended to cash in on the success of Square's flagship Famicom RPG.

Rather than stick with *Final Fantasy*'s traditional turn-based battles, however, *Seiken Densetsu* used an action-RPG combat system that recalled Nintendo's *Legend Of Zelda*, except with RPG systems like experience points, stat-changing equipment and magical spells thrown into the mix. The big twist in the combat came from the power gauge at the bottom of the screen that would gradually fill up whenever the player wasn't attacking. Allow it to fill to the top and you'll be able to perform a MAX attack with special properties including, of course, greater damage. The rewards for allowing the gauge to fill up were great but did include some risk, since you obviously couldn't attack for some time while waiting.

» [Game Boy] *Mystic Quest* doesn't fit with its *Final Fantasy* branding, but it's worth checking out in its own right.

Levelling up in *Seiken Densetsu* was a simple affair, basically asking you to assign points to just four different categories: Power, for damage ratings; Stamina, for defence; Wisdom, for magic points; and Will, which increased the speed with which the power gauge would fill. Though simplistic, there was just enough variety here to ensure that the player could level up their character in a personalised way, defining their statistics in a way that complemented their own combat strategies.

The Secrets Of Mana

"Secret Of Mana introduced many European gamers to the joys of the JRPG"

Though a fun little action-RPG, *Seiken Densetsu* was far from a huge success. Even now it is rarely afforded much attention, either as the first in a very popular series or in the context of the Game Boy's best RPGs. This may be because it was released at a time when RPGs were still an obscure genre in the West, or may simply be because of the confused heritage of the title. When it was first released in the UK, *Seiken Densetsu* went by the name of *Mystic Quest* and may have been confused with the 1993 SNES release *Mystic Quest Legend*, another *Final Fantasy* spin-off title that was otherwise unrelated to the Game Boy game. And to make matters worse, *Mystic Quest* was re-released in 1998 by Sunsoft as *Final Fantasy Adventure*, presumably to cash in on the success of *Final Fantasy VII*. In reality, however, this only confused even more gamers, who found *Final Fantasy Adventure* to be a primitive action game that had nothing in common with the luxurious PlayStation RPG with which they'd fallen in love the year before.



Secret Of Mana

One of the lesser-known facts about *Seiken Densetsu* is that it actually began life as a very different game. Originally intended for the Famicom Disk System, it was supposed to be an epic adventure, called *Seiken Densetsu: The Emergence Of Excalibur*, which would span five separate disks. But management at Square deemed the project too ambitious and expensive, and cancelled development during pre-production. The game was therefore heavily redesigned and resurrected as a Game Boy project a few years later.

This downgrade of ambition is a fate also suffered by the sequel. *Seiken Densetsu 2* was originally designed for the Super Famicom's proposed PlayStation add-on, a CD-ROM drive for the Japanese SNES, which was, infamously, eventually abandoned by Nintendo, prompting Sony to develop the PlayStation into the standalone console that changed the games industry overnight. No one could have predicted the eventual success of the PlayStation, however, so instead of following Sony, Square stayed with Nintendo – for the time being, at least – and shifted *Seiken Densetsu 2* to cartridge format. Consequently, a significant amount of content had to be removed from the game in order to fit it into the much smaller ROM space on the cartridge, and first to go was the plan to have multiple routes through the adventure, culminating in several possible alternate endings.

Despite these changes, *Seiken Densetsu 2*, or *Secret Of Mana* as



» [SNES] Even with its downgraded scope, *Secret Of Mana* stands tall among SNES RPGs.



» The Rabite has been used for loads of *Mana* merchandise. Here's a pair of lovely slippers.

Masters Of Mana

Koichi Ishii

Koichi Ishii is the creator of *Seiken Densetsu* and has worked on every game in the series to date. He first joined Square in 1987 and worked on many of its earliest RPGs, including the first three *Final Fantasy* titles and the original *SaGa*. Ishii designed and oversaw all of the *Mana* games while also contributing to other Square titles like *SaGa Frontier* and *Final Fantasy XI*, before leaving the company in 2007 to set up his own studio called Grezzo, where he developed a Japan-only WiiWare RPG called *Line Attack Heroes*. With Ishii no longer at Square Enix, the future of the *Mana* series is in serious doubt.

Yoshinori Kitase

Another Square veteran, Kitase's contribution to the *Mana* series begins and ends with the scenario writing on *Mystic Quest*. Since then, however, Kitase has gone on to become one of the most important individuals at Square Enix. He's produced and directed a string of hits over the years and quickly rose to the head of the publisher's main development team, where he recently oversaw *Final Fantasy XIII*.

Masters Of Mana

Hiromichi Tanaka

One of the founding members of Square, going all the way back to 1983, Tanaka can still be found in the offices of Square Enix today and was most recently responsible for *Final Fantasy XIV*, but let's not dwell on that. Tanaka programmed Square's first game, *The Death Trap*, then designed the first three *Final Fantasy* games, and later went on to design both *Secret Of Mana* and *Seiken Densetsu 3* before moving on to big PlayStation games like *Chrono Cross* and *Xenogears*.

Nasir Gebelli

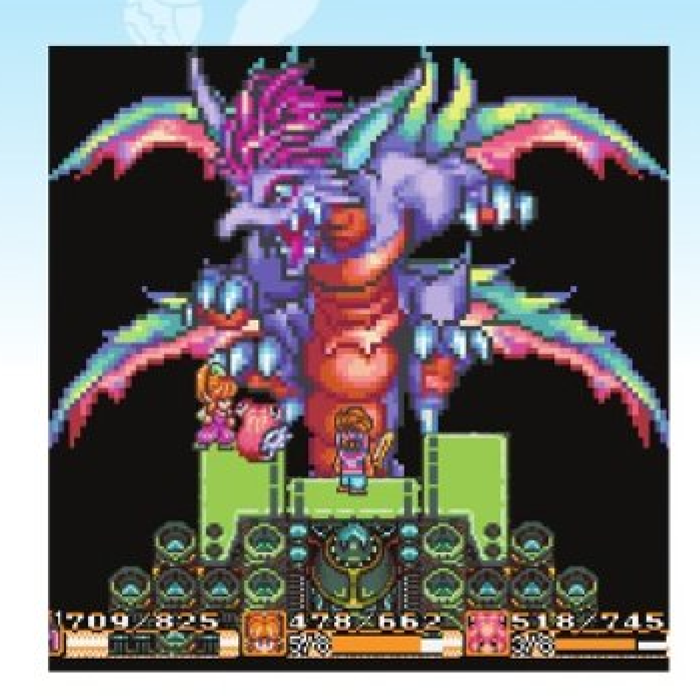
The videogame programmer that other videogame programmers worship, Nasir Gebelli made his name on the Apple II before moving to Japan to join Square. Gebelli worked on all of the developer's major Famicom games and was the main programmer on *Secret Of Mana*, his final Square game before leaving to found his own company.

» [SNES] There's a scene in *Secret Of Mana* where you meet Santa Claus. Lord knows why, but it is pretty cool.

it was renamed for the West, still went on to become one of the most accomplished and popular RPGs of the 16-bit generation. Building on the template of the original Game Boy game, it obviously featured greatly enhanced graphics and sound, but it's the evolution of the gameplay that made it a truly excellent sequel. Take the combat, for example: the power gauge remained from the first game, but now it was much more important to the flow of battles. Instead of waiting for the gauge to fill before striking, you now had to hold down the attack button and let go to strike when the power had reached the desired strength. And instead of levelling up the speed of the gauge, you now levelled up your weapons, each level adding an extra bar to the gauge and making the MAX attack extremely powerful but also increasing the amount of time it takes to charge up. You're still free to move your character around while charging, so you can still avoid enemy attacks, although you do move a little slower, and this creates an interesting pace that feels halfway between turn-based and real-time combat.

Secret Of Mana is remembered for a number of its qualities but none more so, perhaps, than its multiplayer functionality. In the original game you would occasionally recruit partner characters who would tag along behind you, but in *Secret Of Mana* you had two permanent party members, constant companions who would help out in combat and could call upon their own special abilities. As the player you could leave these characters to AI control, or you could switch between them to take more direct command over their actions. If you had a multi-tap and a couple of friends, however, you could





all play the game together, the three of you taking control of a character each and working your way through the adventure as a real-life party of warriors. This was a truly unique selling point at the time and remains fairly unusual even today, which is strange because it actually worked incredibly well. There was something deeply enriching about playing through an epic RPG with your friends by your side. It added a tactical element to combat as you vocally shared strategies or called upon each other for help during difficult situations and, in the long term, it felt like a true journey that you shared together. Played in the pre-internet days, it became a shared obsession over a number of weeks as you and your friends would meet up during evenings and weekends to conquer the game, much in the same way that the previous generation of gamers would have banded together to play pen-and-paper RPGs like *Dungeons & Dragons*.

A deep, strategic RPG system, the innovative multiplayer component and the undeniably attractive game world of *Secret Of Mana* all came together to make it one of the greatest RPGs of the era, and it is rightfully remembered today as a stone cold classic, especially in Europe where it was responsible for introducing many console owners to the joys of the JRPG in the absence of

The Secrets Of Mana

Masters Of Mana

Hiroki Kikuta

Originally an anime composer, Hiroki Kikuta was hired by Square when a mutual love of prog rock led *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu to warm to him in an interview. Kikuta's first job at Square was on *Romancing SaGa* and subsequently moved on to scoring duties on both *Secret Of Mana* and *Seiken Densetsu 3*. And a fine job he did too. Kikuta left Square in 1998 to found his own development studio where he designed, produced, wrote and scored PlayStation RPG *Koudelka*, before leaving to become a freelance composer. His most recent work was for Sega on the PSP RPG *Shining Hearts*.

Akitoshi Kawazu

As the list of games made by Akitoshi Kawazu reads like the most difficult, cruelly complex and unfathomably obtuse titles that Square has ever produced, we have to assume that the company keeps him employed as some kind of sick joke. We wouldn't find it amusing to occasionally produce unprofitable games just because they frustrate and confuse anyone unlucky enough to play them, but Square and Kawazu clearly do. Kawazu is best known for the *SaGa* series of RPGs but also produced *Legend Of Mana* and went on to create the *Crystal Chronicles* series, the first of which was a multiplayer GameCube title that forced one of the players to do nothing but carry an orb around. Too cruel, Kawazu.

local releases of any *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest* titles.

Seiken Densetsu 3

With *Secret Of Mana* celebrated for introducing European gamers to the console role-playing game, then its even better sequel can be considered one of the most heartbreaking releases in videogame history, since it was never released outside Japan. One of the most wildly ambitious games of its time, *Seiken Densetsu 3* was so complicated that it would have cost Square a fortune to localise into English, and in 1995, with the 32-bit PlayStation and Saturn firmly established across the world, it's easy to see why the publisher decided not to take the risk on the dwindling SNES market.

All good things come to those who wait, however, and distraught *Secret Of Mana* fans finally got their taste of its sequel in 2000 when the game was unofficially translated by a hacker called Neill Corlett. What those fans found in the translated version was no less than RPG brilliance, way ahead of its time even five years after the fact. Though the number of players was reduced from three to two, *Seiken Densetsu 3* is, by all other measures, a much more ambitious game. Rather than three set characters, it offers a pool of six from which you must select three at the start. Each has their own personal story, and your choice of who to make the main character will influence the direction of the game, including encounters that happen through the adventure and how the story ends. It's an impressive system that adds a personal touch to the flow of the game's plot, as well as creating significant replay value. And much like Square's *Chrono Trigger*, released in the same year, it proves that Japanese RPGs are nowhere near as rigid and stale as some detractors would have you believe.

The innovations don't stop with the story either. *Seiken Densetsu 3* also boasts an unusual calendar system that not only stands as an early example of a day-to-night simulation but also moves through a weekly calendar in which each day offers stat bonuses for certain types of magic, should you use the right kind on the correct day. There's also a rather complex class system that enabled the player to promote their characters to different classes at certain junctures and also offered a branching path that governed whether the characters became good, evil or something in between. Take that, BioWare!

If *Seiken Densetsu 3* had ever been released outside Japan then it would surely be recognised as a classic equally as brilliant as *Secret Of Mana*. Instead it merely became a footnote in the history of the series, albeit one that those unafraid to download, patch and emulate regard as one of the greatest lost treasures of the 16-bit era.



» [SNES] *Seiken Densetsu 3* is full of impressive bosses, including Dolan here.



Legend Of Mana

The years following the release of *Seiken Densetsu 3* saw Square transform into a games industry goliath on the back of the success of 1997's *Final Fantasy VII*, and while this period saw the *Mana* series go quiet for a couple of years, it soon returned as the affluent Square entered its most prolific age, churning out PlayStation games like they were going out of fashion. By the time *Legend Of Mana* was created, however, some of the original development team had moved on to other projects. In stepped new producer Akitoshi Kawazu, a Square veteran known for his punishingly difficult, obtusely designed games like *Final Fantasy II* and the offbeat *SaGa* series. And while the true creator of the



» [PSone] For all the game's flaws, the hand-drawn watercolour art of *Legend Of Mana* can look gorgeous.

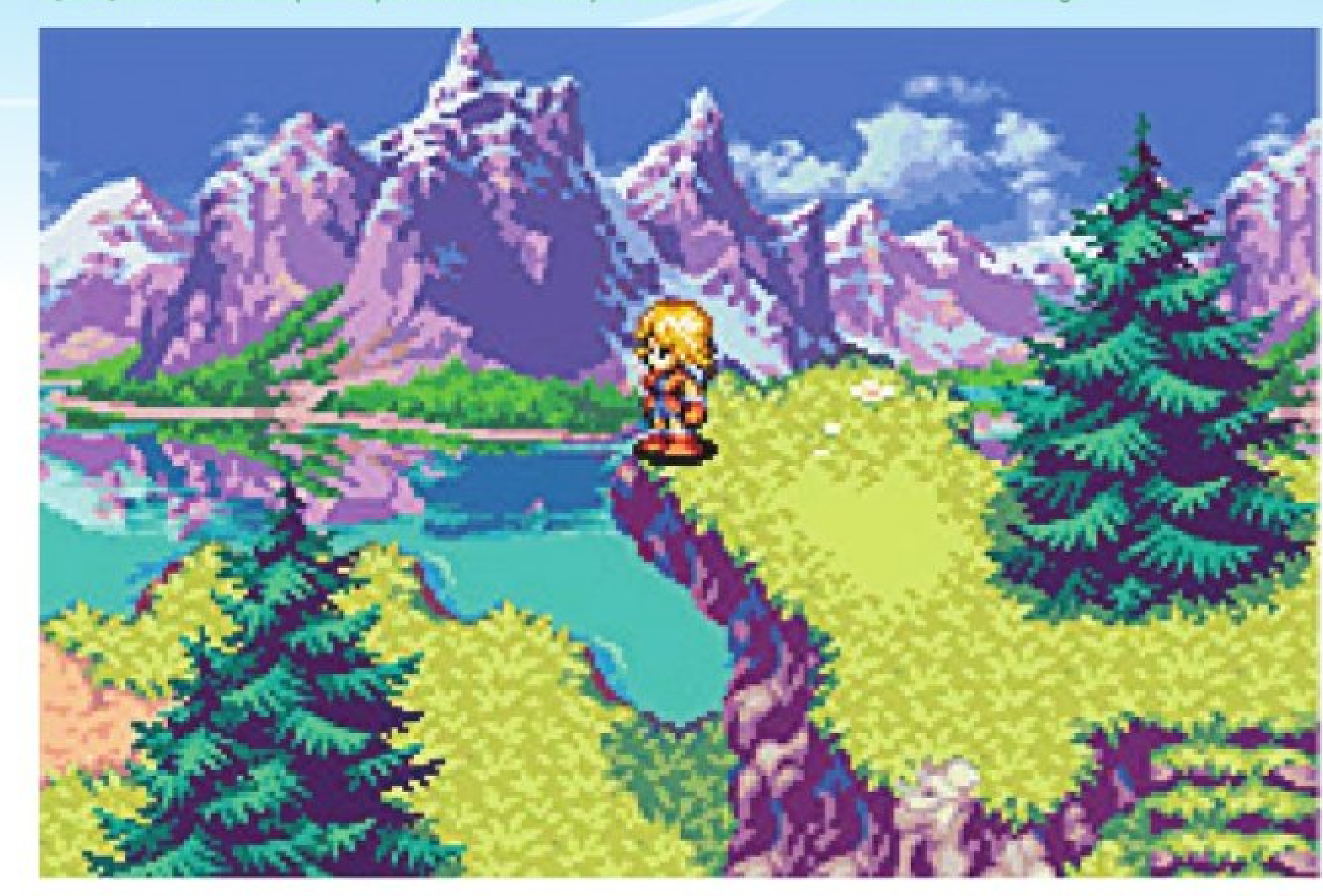
Mana series, Koichi Ishii, remained as director, Kawazu's influence on *Legend Of Mana* is unmistakable.

Rather than take the player on a journey through an epic, scripted adventure across a huge, open game world, *Legend Of Mana* went with an altogether different and somewhat bizarre form of progression. Start the game afresh and you're presented with an empty overworld of slots, into which you must plant artefacts in order to grow a randomly generated location containing towns and dungeons. A neat idea in theory, particularly for the way it increased the sense of personalisation and replay value established in *Seiken Densetsu 3*, but this system ultimately disappointed by making the player feel like they were playing through a series of unconnected mini-quests rather than one huge adventure. And while the resolutely 2D visuals were undeniably attractive in the era of pre-rendered backgrounds and blocky polygon characters, their random nature pushed the art direction to a point where the locations naturally lacked a sense of personality or identity, making the world feel a little stale after a while.

Legend Of Mana tried to innovate in other areas, such as the multiplayer. A second player could take control of the AI partners that would occasionally team up with the main character, or they could take the character from their own save data, copy it to a PlayStation memory card, and import it into their friend's game, taking all their stats and equipment with them and retaining any progress they made during their friend's adventure. Another neat idea, this too fell flat because two players controlling the same character, no matter how differently they might have been levelled up, only increased the disconnected feeling between the player and the game's fiction.

Legend Of Mana can be considered a brave attempt by Square to reinvent the *Seiken Densetsu* series in a prolific period of its history but, unfortunately, it did so in a way that detracted from the main strengths of the previous games while also failing to excel in its own right. In retrospect, this is the exact point where the cracks started to show in the series as a whole.

» [GBA] Don't let its development by an outside team fool you: *Sword Of Mana* has undeniable series heritage.



Sword Of Mana

After *Legend Of Mana*, a number of the key *Seiken Densetsu* team left Square to form their own development studio called Brownie Brown. Rather than forge on without them, however, Square simply outsourced development of its next title to Brownie Brown itself. The result was *Sword Of Mana*, a Game Boy Advance remake of the Game Boy original, *Mystic Quest*.

The high-end 2D graphics of the GBA allowed Brownie Brown to create a visual style in *Sword Of Mana* that was much closer to the look of the other games in the series, particularly *Seiken Densetsu 3*, and the developer also took the opportunity to bring the setting more in line with the *Mana* mythology, removing some of the *Final Fantasy* elements left in from when *Seiken Densetsu* was supposed to be a spin-off title.

Much of *Mystic Quest*'s original gameplay and story remain intact, but there are also a few changes in the remake, most notably the ability to choose to play as and follow the story of the girl character, as well as the boy from the original game. The developer

» [Mobile] *Mystic Quest* has actually been remade twice. Here's the mobile phone version, which is different to both the Game Boy and the Game Boy Advance versions.



"SEIKEN DENSETSU 3 IS REGARDED BY FANS AS ONE OF THE GREATEST LOST TREASURES OF THE 16-BIT ERA"

Secret Of Evermore

When *Seiken Densetsu 3* failed to release outside Japan, American and European SNES owners got *Secret Of Evermore* instead. The only game to ever be developed at Square USA, *Secret Of Evermore* was totally unrelated to *Secret Of Mana* but is constantly compared to it because of the similar title, genre, platform and release date. Nowhere near as bad a game as some people would have you believe, it has become something of a whipping boy among Square fans who blame it for taking the place of *Secret Of Mana 2*. *Secret Of Evermore*'s lead programmer, Brian Fehdrau, told **games™** in March 2009 that the decision not to localise *Seiken Densetsu 3* had nothing to do with the development of *Secret Of Evermore*. "The people on our team never had anything to do with translations," he said. "That was all done by people outside the team, who had been working for the company since before we were hired. In fact, there were several translations done during the development of *Evermore*. The choice not to translate *Seiken Densetsu 3* was made overseas by the parent company in Japan, for undisclosed reasons of their own. I've made speculations as to why but, honestly, I don't have or know any official reason."

Further speculation suggests that *Seiken Densetsu 3* was never released outside Japan because of deeply integrated bugs in the code that would have been too difficult to remove in order to satisfy Nintendo USA's quality control demands. The fact that the game still hasn't been remade or even re-released on the Wii's Virtual Console does lend some credence to this theory.

The Secrets Of Mana

also tried to bring in some of the multiplayer functionality that the series is known for. Though you couldn't actually play simultaneously, you could link two GBAs together to trade items and even partner characters – a nice touch if you could find someone else who owned the game.

Sword Of Mana is also the only game in the series to claim the accolade of its own special edition console, as Square and Nintendo got together to create the Mana Blue Game Boy Advance SP, which came packaged with a copy of the game and a special carrying case.

Children Of Mana

It was right in the middle of *Sword Of Mana*'s development that the unthinkable happened at Square. 1 April 2003 saw the monolithic publisher officially merge with its longtime rival, *Dragon Quest* creator Enix, to form the biggest developer/publisher in Japan: Square Enix. And while the merger had little effect on the company's business practices, there were a number of trends that, perhaps coincidentally, started to emerge around this time. Encouraged by the success of *Final Fantasy X-2* and inspired by fan demand for a remake of or sequel to *Final Fantasy VII*, Square Enix began its move toward what it called 'polymorphic content'. The idea behind this was that instead of developing a hit and then creating sequels to it, the company would plan several titles, all in the same universe, at the same time in order to strengthen the brand by offering fans a body of work over a relatively concentrated period of time. The first of these works was *Compilation Of Final Fantasy VII*, a series of different genre titles each revolving around Square's most popular work, while other examples include *Ivalice Alliance*, a series of games set in the same world as *Final Fantasy XII* and *Vagrant Story*; and *Fabula Nova Crystallis*, three connected RPGs in the *Final Fantasy XIII* setting. In 2005, Square Enix announced *World Of Mana*, a series of *Seiken Densetsu* games that would be developed back-to-back and explore similar themes but in different videogame genres.

The first game in the *World Of Mana* compilation was *Children Of Mana*, a 2006 Nintendo DS title developed by Nex Entertainment, perhaps best known for its work on modern *Shining* titles *Shining Soul*, *Shining Tears* and *Shining Wind*. Like those games, *Children Of Mana* was a dungeon crawler, heavily inspired by *Diablo* and focused on randomly generated, many-floored dungeons and loot drops. The game also uses the DS's wireless communications to enable four-player co-op, wherein the three helper players retain all experience and loot gained for their own adventures.

> "Heroes Of Mana is without doubt the series' greatest since 1995's Seiken Densetsu 3"

Friends Of Mana

Along with *Seiken Densetsu 3*, this is one of only two *Mana* games not to be released outside Japan. This isn't quite the same loss for fans as the Super Famicom game was, however,



» [PS2] The series' only 3D instalment was disappointing to many.

The World Of Mana

Though the Seiken Densetsu series of games are mostly unconnected in terms of their story and characters, they do all share some common elements. Here are a few of them...



Rabites

Every game series has its regular, recurring enemy type. *Dragon Quest* has Slimes, *Mario* has Goombas and *Seiken Densetsu* has the Rabite. These yellow, rabbit-like enemies have appeared in every game in the series and have become something of a mascot for Square, which has made sure to slap them on every bit of *Mana* merchandise going. And who wouldn't? Just look at the little fella.



The Mana Sword

A recurring weapon throughout the series, the Mana Sword is often the most powerful weapon in the game and is wielded by the hero. Yes, it's very cliched, but then the series did start off with the working title of *The Emergence Of Excalibur*, and *Seiken Densetsu* literally translates as *Legend Of The Holy Sword*. So we'll let it off.



The Mana Tree

Appearing in every single game in the series, the Mana Tree is the source of all the world's magic, and the plot of each game often revolves around trying to save or preserve it. The iconic cover art to *Secret Of Mana* features the Mana Tree in staggering scale against the tiny protagonists, making for one of the most iconic images in RPG history. The less said about the cartoony Mana Tree and its face, as seen from *Legend Of Mana* onwards, the better.

Ring Menu

One of the least talked about but most important parts of the *Mana* series' gameplay is the Ring Menu. It doesn't feature in all of the games, but those that use it are all the better for it. With a press of a button, the action pauses and takes you to an on-screen menu, thereby keeping you aware of the placement of all enemies. Acquire a new item and it will be added to the ring without crowding the other items out. Genius.



Flammie

The Flammie is a sort of dragon that the player uses to get around the world in both Super Famicom games plus *Children Of Mana*. In the 16-bit games, the player summons Flammie by using a monkey drum and then flies around, in real-time, using the console's iconic Mode 7 display.

as *Friends Of Mana* was a multiplayer hack-and-slash game developed for Japanese mobile phones. We're not missing much, though it would be nice if Square remade the game on the iPhone for the completists.

Dawn Of Mana

Titled *Seiken Densetsu 4* in Japan, *Dawn Of Mana* was clearly intended to be the tentpole release in the *World Of Mana* compilation as well as a return to what made the series great in its first three instalments. Sadly, however, it really failed to achieve either of these goals. The first and only 3D instalment in the series, *Dawn Of Mana* was rather bizarrely influenced by *Half-Life 2*, which series creator Koichi Ishii saw at a trade show in 2004. Ishii loved the Havok physics engine used in Valve's landmark FPS and decided to license it for use in his PlayStation 2 *Mana* title, building the entirety of the gameplay around it. Big mistake!

Where the classic *Mana* titles merely mixed traditional role-playing stat progression with *Zelda*-like combat to create a fun yet deep combat system, *Dawn Of Mana* went for a much more obscure alternative. The idea was that you couldn't just walk up to an enemy and hit them; you had to startle them first by whacking an object toward them. The problem with this was that the Havok physics engine was a bit too realistic with its results and, more often than not, you'd whack an object only to see it bounce off in a completely unintended direction.

To make matters worse, *Dawn Of Mana*'s experience system was completely bizarre. You could gain levels like any other game, but as soon as you moved to a new area the game would boot you back down to level 1. The only way to permanently boost your stats was to kill enemies only after their Panic level had raised beyond 99 after you'd repeatedly scared them by smacking in-game objects in their direction. Given how difficult and frustrating this was, the prospect of permanently upgrading your character was enough to turn you off playing the game at all, which hardly makes *Dawn Of Mana* worthy of the 'true sequel' status.

Masters Of Mana

Yoko Shimomura

Quite possibly the greatest videogame composer of all time, Yoko Shimomura is responsible for many classic themes and scores including *Final Fight*, *Street Fighter II*, *Breath Of Fire*, *Kingdom Hearts*, *Parasite Eve* and *Little King's Story*, among many, many others. Shimomura wrote the soundtracks to both *Legend Of Mana* and *Heroes Of Mana* – two games that were, quite frankly, beneath her.

Shinichi Kameoka

Starting his videogame career on *Secret Of Mana*, Shinichi Kameoka designed the playable characters in that title, *Seiken Densetsu 3* and *Legend Of Mana* before leaving Square to form his own company, Brownie Brown, which developed *Sword Of Mana* in 2003. Brownie Brown's most recent work was on *Professor Layton And The Specter's Flute*, and it is currently developing *Fantasy Life* for Nintendo's 3DS.



» [DS] Battles in *Heroes* range from small skirmishes like this to gigantic battles between the kingdoms of the world.





» [DS] *Heroes Of Mana* is the series' most radical change of direction, but it works surprisingly well.

Heroes Of Mana

As a real-time strategy game, *Heroes Of Mana* is a world away from the accessible action gameplay that fans fell in love with in *Mystic Quest* and *Secret Of Mana* but, in spite of this, the 2007 DS game is a remarkably respectful entry in the *Mana* series. Although most *Mana* games are set in different worlds and can be considered separate games connected only by a few common elements like Rabites and the Mana Tree, *Heroes Of Mana* is actually a direct prequel to *Seiken Densetsu 3*, using that game's backdrop of warring states as the perfect setting for its epic, 50-unit-large strategy battles.

Entirely controlled using the DS's touch screen, *Heroes Of Mana* plays a pretty decent RTS while also retaining the look and feel of the classic *Mana* games. It's obviously not a patch on 'proper' RTS games like *Command & Conquer* or *StarCraft*, but it also needn't be so. Instead it's a more accessible game; a gateway to the genre for console gamers more used to action or turn-based RPGs.

The Future Of Mana

Heroes Of Mana's RTS gameplay makes it an unlikely saviour for the series, but it is without doubt the best game in the *World Of Mana* compilation and the series' greatest since 1995's *Seiken Densetsu 3*. But it's also not the way most *Mana* fans would like to see the series bow out. What we'd really like to see is a proper action-RPG that plays just like the Super Famicom games. With creator Koichi Ishii now gone from Square Enix it seems unlikely that we'll ever get such a game, but then Ishii is also the man responsible for alienating fans with the *World Of Mana* compilation, so perhaps it's time for someone else to take the reins, like the old team at Brownie Brown or *Secret Of Mana* producer and Square mainstay Hiromichi Tanaka.

While there are no official plans to create a new game in the series, it's clear that Square Enix hasn't forgotten about it yet. *Secret Of Mana* is due an iPhone release in early 2011, and fan demand for an official localisation of *Seiken Densetsu 3* is as fervent today as it was in 1995. The series may well be dormant, but it isn't dead yet.



CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

DEFLEKTOR

INFO

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **DEVELOPER:** COSTA PANAYI



We've no idea what caused Costa Panayi to create the compelling *Deflektor*, but we're extremely glad he did. Like the best puzzle games, *Deflektor* doesn't require outrageously good visuals or over-complicated gameplay mechanics, it just requires a simple concept that's flawlessly executed.

The idea behind *Deflektor* is deliciously simple, requiring you to do little more than ensure that a laser beam meets its destination while hitting a required number of cells that are dotted about each single-screen stage. The trick here, however, is that you only have a finite amount of energy to use and that you're playing against a strict time limit, as your energy bar slowly depletes. Needless to say, it soon becomes incredibly frantic as you crazily flip and rotate mirrors in order to ensure that your laser reaches its destination without causing the system to overheat and lose one of your three lives.

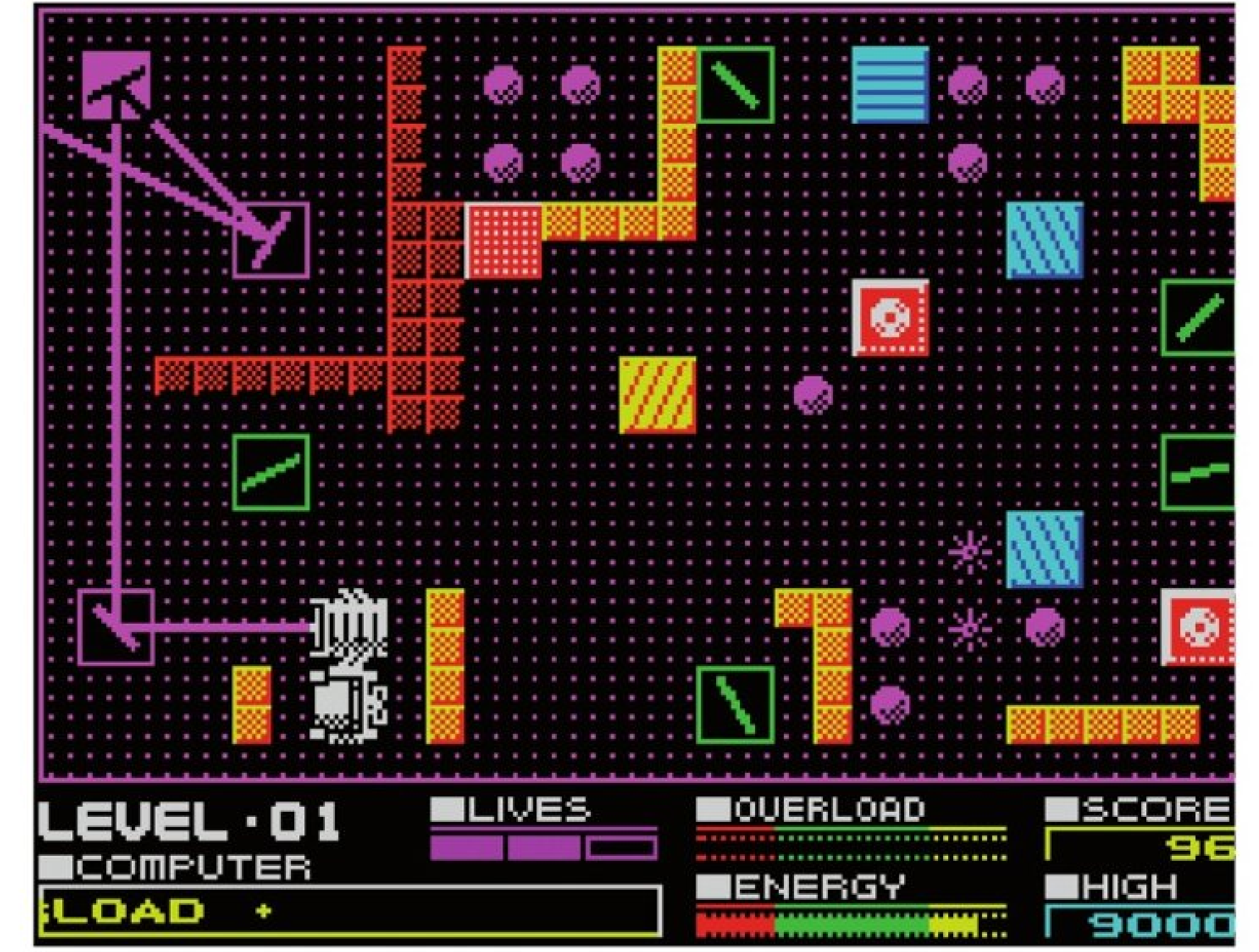
Things are made even trickier by a number of different objects that Panayi has included to ensure that your laser planning is a constant misery (in a good way, of course). Mirrors have to be rotated in order to bounce your beam to its destination, mines constantly crop up and can cause all sorts of problems if they're not dealt with, while allowing the laser bounce back upon itself will cause an overload that, if not dealt with, will cause the eventual lost of one of your lives. Things are made even worse by the inclusion of Gremlins; annoying little buggers that will wonder around the screen and play havoc with your mirrors. Luckily the blighters can be zapped with your laser, but they can still cause untold havoc if you don't quickly remove them.

As the levels progress the pattern layouts become ever more complex and you'll soon be bouncing your laser through maze-like corridors in order to ensure that it reaches its precious receiver. It gets increasingly hectic and the pressure becomes even tenser, yet *Deflektor* is still fantastic fun to play, even if it can get incredibly frustrating.

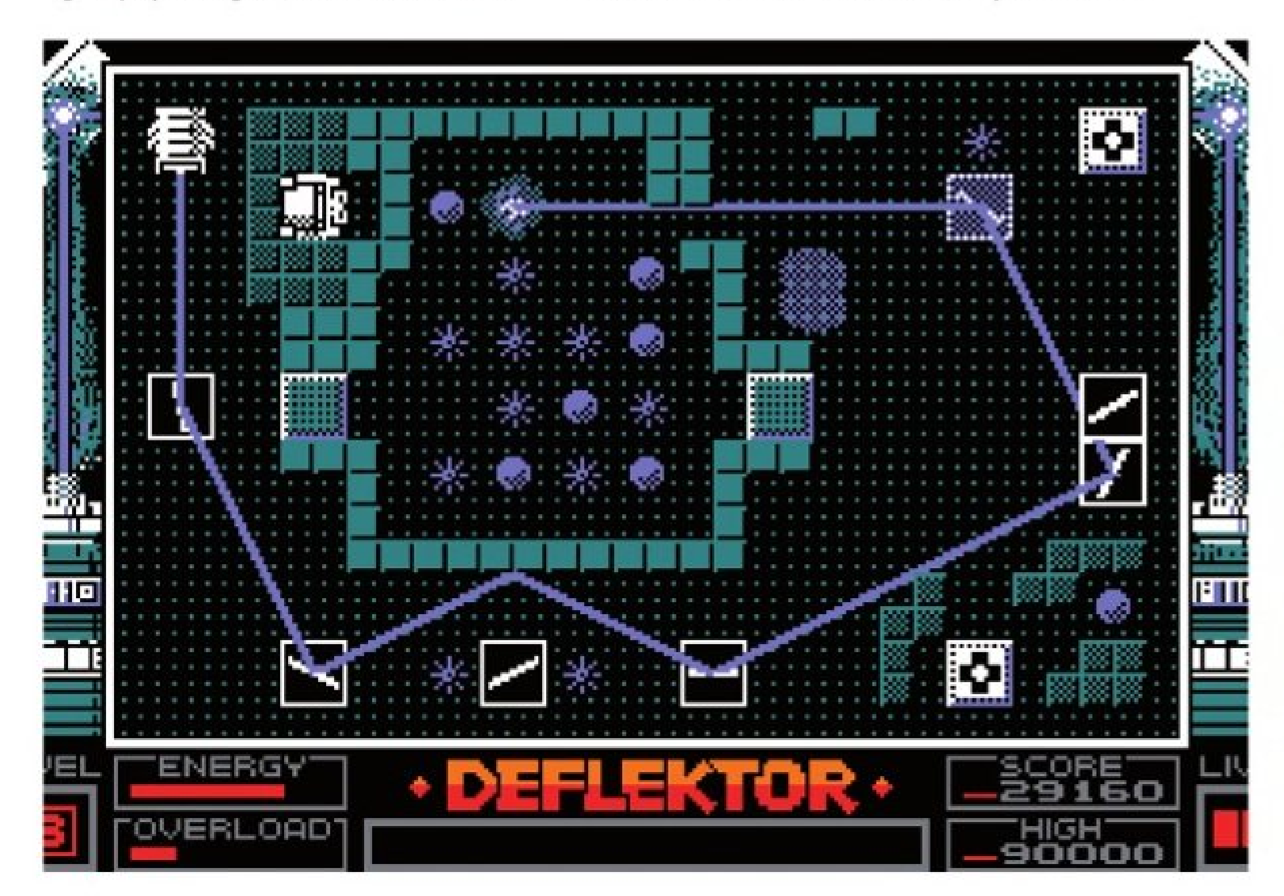
While *Deflektor* isn't the most original of concepts (it borrows heavily from Virgin Games' *Rebel*) it adds plenty of its own ideas and still ends up feeling refreshing and highly entertaining. It was ported to a number of different 8 and 16-bit systems and while the Atari ST and Amiga versions benefit from the larger colour palette and mouse control the 8-bit offerings are still worth experiencing. It's even appeared on newer systems like Sony's PS Minis service, but we still prefer the original.

Due to the favourable reviews and the high sales, a sequel, *Mindbender*, appeared in 1989. Although it built nicely upon the ideas it wasn't as well received, which is a pity really as we quite like it.

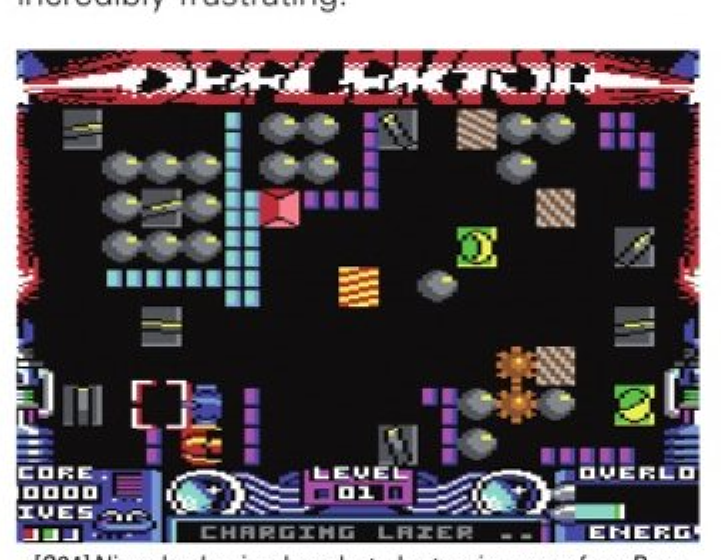
Deflektor was never going to change the face of the puzzle genre, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy it for what it is. A damn good game that will bring out the best (and worst) in you.



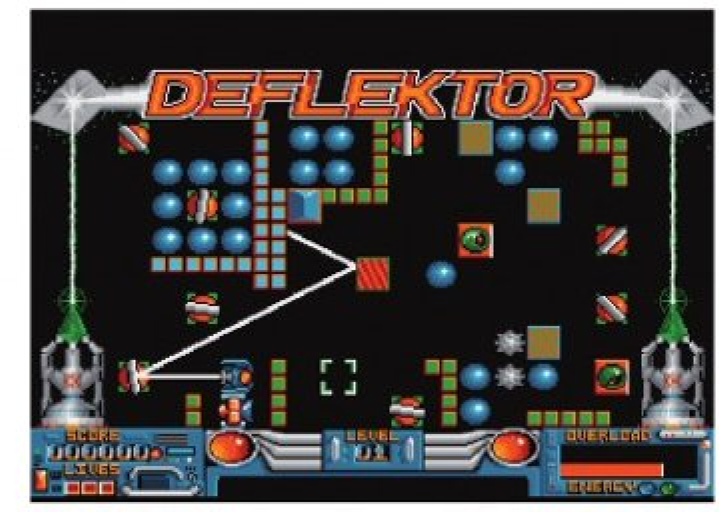
» [ZX Spectrum] The Spectrum version is surprisingly colourful and very easy on the eyes.



» [Amstrad CPC] The Amstrad once again gets shafted by a truly weak port. The gameplay is still great, but we remain bitter.



» [C64] Nice chunky visuals and a truly stunning score from Ben Daglish makes the C64 version our favourite 8-bit *Deflektor.*

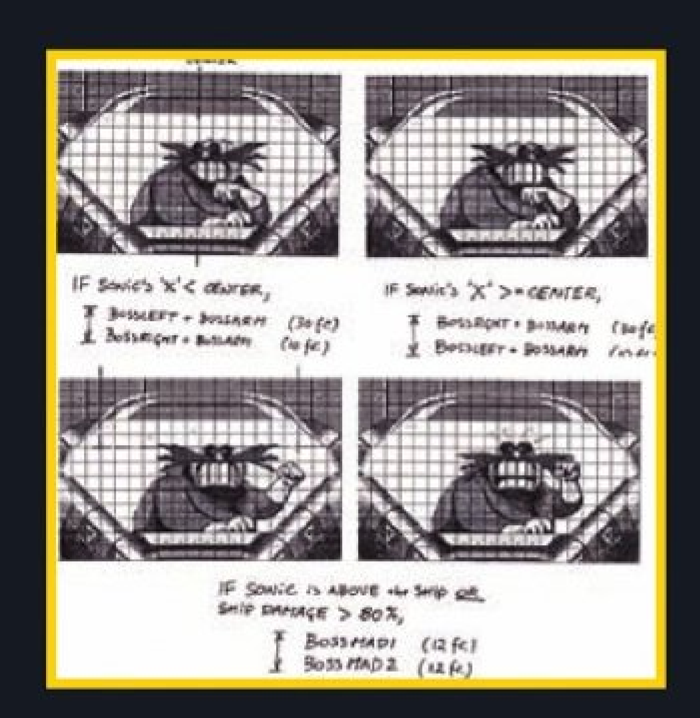


» [Amiga] Aside from the vastly improved visuals, the Amiga version retains the same excellent gameplay as its 8-bit peers.



Conceived as a stop gap and developed in a hurry, Sonic Spinball still stands as the greatest thing that could have come out of another game's production delays. Cole Machin talks with Peter Morawiec about how this classic came to be







» Some of the earliest original storyboards from *Sonic Spinball*'s production.

With a title such as *Sonic Spinball*, as entertaining and well-designed as the game itself might be, it's hard to really understand the story of its creation without first putting a little perspective on some of the circumstances that surround it. In fact, it's sometimes hard to imagine certain games ever having seen the light of day without a very special set of circumstances. In the case of *Sonic Spinball*, it's all about timing.

For those who may have spent the early Nineties living in a cave, the 1992 holiday season had been a very important one for Sega. It saw the release of what would become the bestselling game ever released for the Mega Drive: *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. A title credited not only with giving Sega a much-needed sales push in its battle for console superiority with the SNES, but also with giving the title character a final and hardy thrust into the spotlight, with making secure his place in history as a gaming icon. It would be no exaggeration to say that *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* had ensured that Sonic would become Sega's most important and lucrative piece of intellectual property.

Considering the incredible success of *Sonic 2*'s holiday release, it's only natural that Sega of America would want to follow up the timely release with another title in the same vein. The only problem was that it had become quite clear that the direct sequel and only other *Sonic* title then in development, *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, would not be ready for release until well after the upcoming holiday season. If there was to be another *Sonic* game ready for every good boy and girl's stocking, something would need to be done – and fast.

"Following the success of *Sonic 1* and *2*, SOA management desired another *Sonic* game for the 1993 holiday season," says Peter Morawiec, the designer at Sega who would later go on to found Luxoflux and Isopod Labs. "Once Sonic Team communicated that they would miss that window, somebody at HQ must have asked whether a smaller, simpler *Sonic*-related title could be developed. The marketing/research folks indicated that *Sonic*'s casino levels were among the favourites, birthing the idea for the overall direction. I honestly don't know who came up with that, but it sounded fun and doable, so STI [Sega Technical Institute] jumped on it."

“Sonic 3 would not be ready until after the holiday season. Something needed to be done”



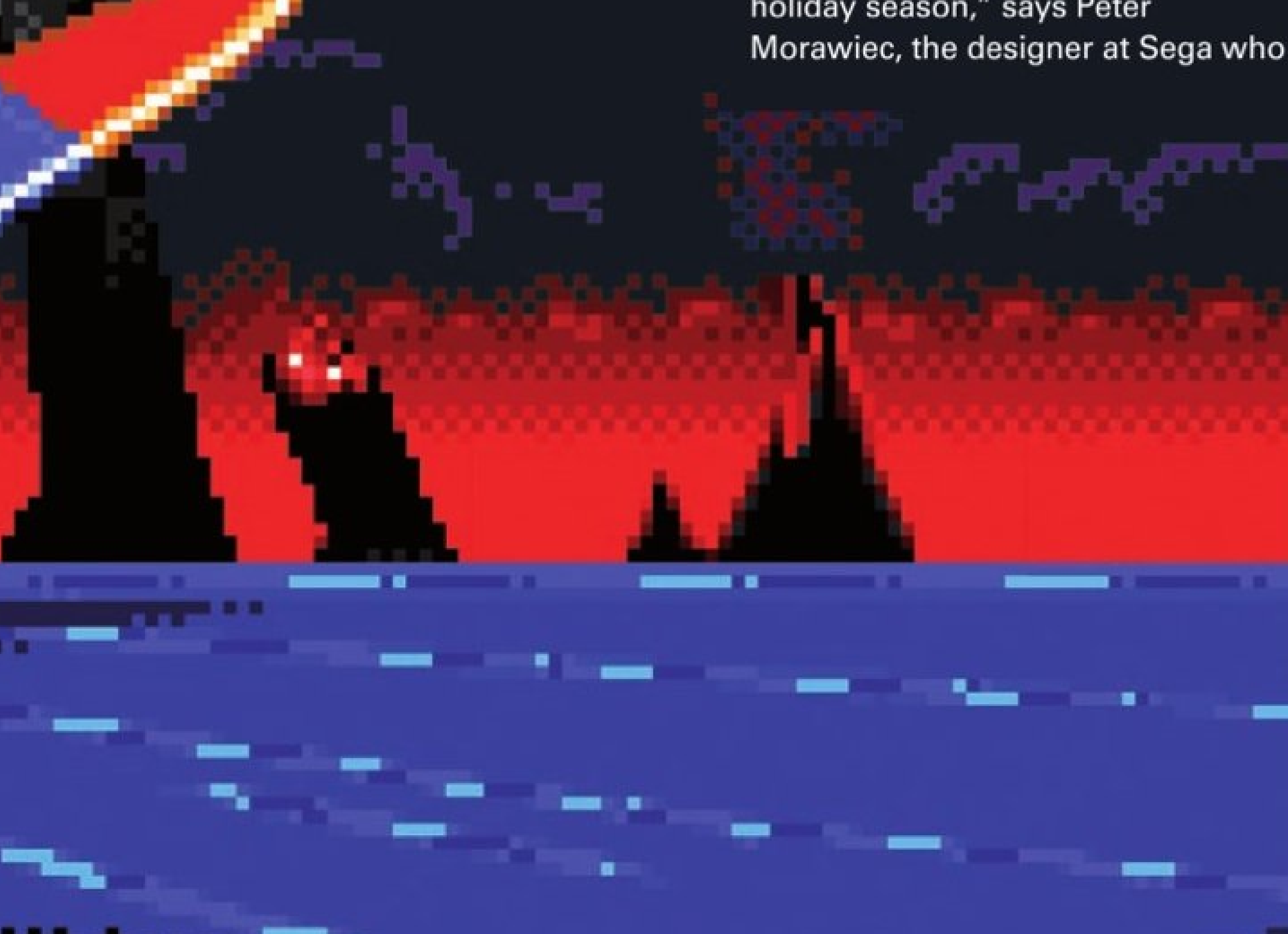
Now, given nothing more than a relatively loose idea of what direction the game may take and a previously established deadline, the team at STI were left to come up with some way of expanding on the concept of *Sonic 2*'s Casino Night Zone; a way of extracting the enjoyable aspects of this single level and expanding on them broadly enough to form a concept around which an entire game could be based. To somehow capture the magic of the level and take it in a new and interesting direction.

"We were given a pretty free rein to brainstorm," says Peter. "Everyone understood that we couldn't and shouldn't try to compete with the mainline *Sonic* franchise, so some departure was expected. I enjoyed the casino levels, but I was also really inspired by an Amiga game of the day called *Pinball Dreams*, which was about the nicest pinball game I've seen. I envisioned more of the real pinball mechanics brought into Sonic's world and felt it presented a truly unique proposition. Collaborating with team members Kurt

SONIC SPINBALL: THE ROLLER COASTER



UNVEILED IN FEBRUARY 2010, Sonic Spinball is a moderately sized rollercoaster located in the Adventure Land area of the Alton Towers theme park. Although the ride was not originally designed with a *Sonic* theme in mind, having previously existed as Spinball Whizzer, the ride became part of a sponsorship deal between Sega and Alton Towers that included both the rollercoaster and a *Sonic*-themed hotel room. As such, the ride was shut down and reworked to a suitable theme. The new vision for the ride was brought about through predominantly cosmetic changes, such as a new red and blue paint scheme, a number of new signs, new props, and even a certain amount of voice work by Sonic's current voice actor. The rebranding of the ride was not taken lightly by Alton Towers, which hosted a grand opening event and ribbon-cutting attended by both representatives of Sega and the blue blur himself.







IT'S LIKE GILLIGAN'S ISLAND

TO SAY THAT initial reactions to *Sonic Spinball* were a little mixed might be a bit of an understatement. Over the years, however, it seems clear that the game's legacy and place in the canon of *Sonic* games is a secure one. Since its original release, ignoring even the Game Gear and Master System ports and their re-releases, *Spinball* has been released in one form or another no less than six times. The game has been included in the *Sega Smash Pack* for the Dreamcast; *Sonic Mega Collection* for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, GameCube and PC; and the *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. It's also currently available for download on the Nintendo Wii's Virtual Console. Had the game been included in *Sonic Jam* for the Sega Saturn, it would hold the distinction of having been available for a major system in every generation since the Mega Drive.



Peterson, Justin Chin and John Duggan, I created an animation to showcase these ideas. We demoed this video to Sega's board, which went over very well, and STI got the green light to proceed."

With the project given the go-ahead, Peter was placed at the helm of perhaps the most important game Sega would release that year. He was given control over Sega's very own mascot, over what was in many ways the public face of the company. Not a bad break for a rookie developer. "I think the animated demo, management's willingness to take a chance on a newbie designer, as well as a bit of luck, landed me the job," he says. "I'm still very grateful to Mr Sugano and then studio head Roger Hector for that break."

Considering the trade-off between the vote of confidence implicit in the commission to work on a game centring around such an important character and the need to ensure that this new release lives up to the standard set by the previous entries, it's unsurprising that Peter's initial feelings seem somewhat mixed: "I felt honoured but also quite overwhelmed. Development time was short and Sonic Team set the quality bar very high, so we had our work cut out for us."

Now that the concept had been cemented and with a team in place, the rush was on. If *Sonic Spinball* was to be finished in time to hit the shelves for holiday shoppers, it would need to be completed in well under a year – a very tight development schedule for a game that would require the level of quality demanded by any *Sonic* title of this era. Amazingly, considering not only this strict timeline but also the possible effects that a failure to capitalise on

> **"If Sonic 3 had progressed a little quicker, the world may have never got to see this unique game"**

Sonic's new-found popularity could have on Sega of America's bottom line, Peter seems to remember encountering very little in the way of corporate pressure surrounding the game's development.

"I can only assume management was under heavy pressure from SOA to deliver, but to Roger's and Sugano's credit, they shielded the team from that very well," continues Peter. "Also, with *Spinball* being an SOA-commissioned title, there was no interference from SOJ. Early on, Roger brought in two seasoned contractors to handle the core programming: Dennis Koble and Lee Actor of Sterling Silver Software, developers of EA's early *PGA Tour Golf* games – fantastic guys to work with. Sonic Team could spare no talent, but most of the remaining STI members were enlisted, and the company also sent us an excellent artist from Japan, Katsuhiko Sato, for a few months."

Despite the decision to bring in veteran talent from outside the Institute to help speed along the project's development, in order to meet the deadlines presented a certain amount of streamlining would need to be done. In fact, changes would need to be made to even the most fundamental ways in which games for the Mega Drive were typically written, as Peter explains: "Much of the code was written in C, not assembly, which was somewhat unusual back in the day because you needed to be as close to the hardware as possible to get the most out of it. Lee and Dennis went with C due to the time constraints, so there were some frame rate concerns and optimising."

The decision to move further away from system language and squeeze performance from the system in another fashion would seem to have been the correct one. Regardless of how many late nights the project may have required, when you look over *Spinball*'s development schedule, the progress made in such a short time is nothing if not impressive. In two short months, between 15 June and August, the project developed from a roughly playable first build, featuring nothing more than the scrolling and collision systems and 80 per cent of the character animations played on a single unfinished level, to a fully completed, ready to ship final build. In 61 days it progressed from something not even suitable for a press demo to a fully fleshed-out game. Amazingly, with such a short time to work, the team had managed to produce not just a game, but a quality game.

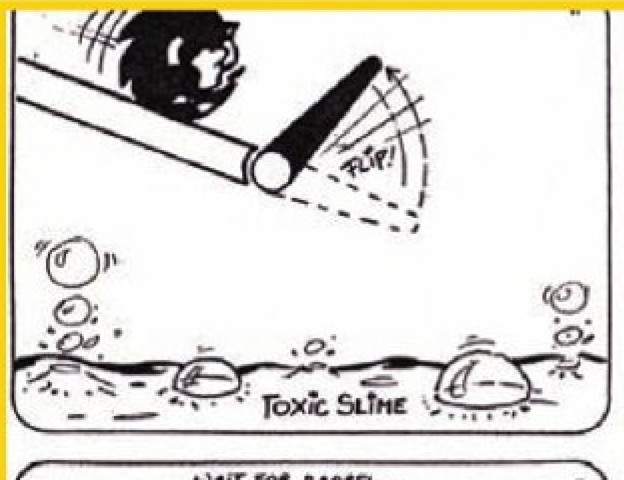
More amazing still is that by all accounts this production work went along smoothly and without drama. Well, perhaps that is something of an exaggeration. There is one piece of *Sonic Spinball* lore, one minor horror story that we just couldn't resist asking to hear a little more about: legend has it that somehow, with the commission to work on a new *Sonic*



» The game's design documents break down every interactive aspect of each of the tables.



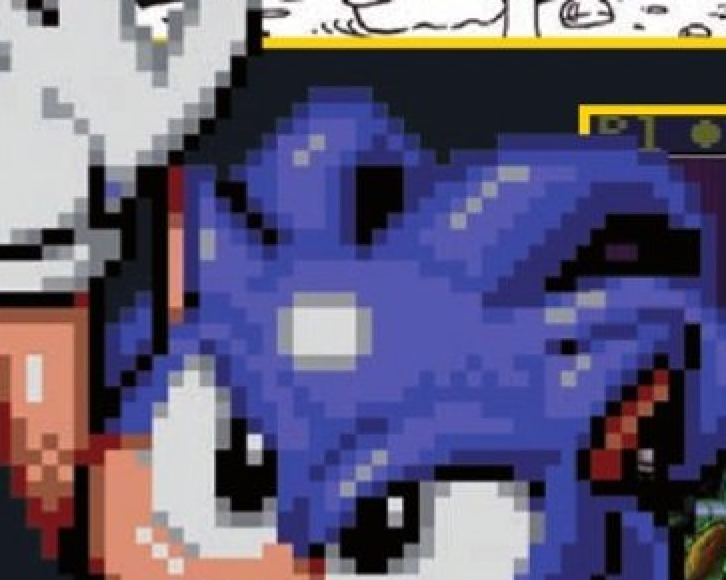
» Tricks based on combining aspects of both pinball and traditional *Sonic* gameplay were created early on.











» [Mega Drive] Much like a real pinball table, *Spinball* is filled with loops and ball catches.

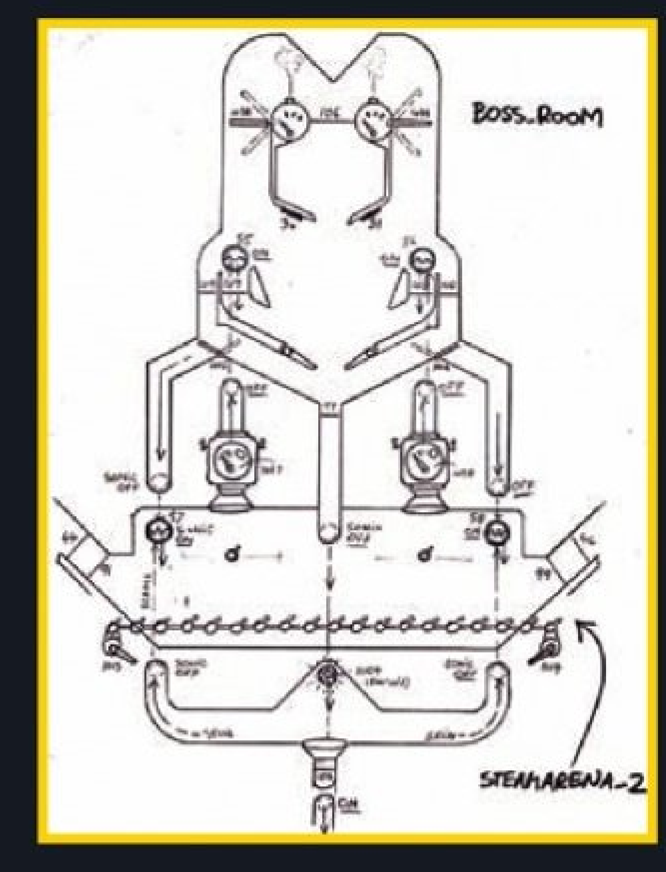


» [Mega Drive] Collecting the level's Chaos Emeralds grants access to the boss.



» [Mega Drive] The game's representation of a real table's LED display adds a little extra flair.





title granted, the message that Sega itself did not, in fact, own the rights to *Sonic*'s theme failed to be passed along – an oversight that would go unnoticed until the final minute of the eleventh hour.

"It was quite a fiasco," recalls Peter. "We were virtually code-released, having a little party in the conference room, when Hirokazu Yasuhara, the lead designer on Sonic Team, casually asked whether we acquired rights to use the title song. Everyone assumed Sega owned the *Sonic 2* theme, which we'd adapted for *Spinball*, where in fact it was a one-shot licence from a Japanese band, Dreams Come True. So, Howard Drossin, our composer, was tasked to create a brand new theme in something like two hours!"

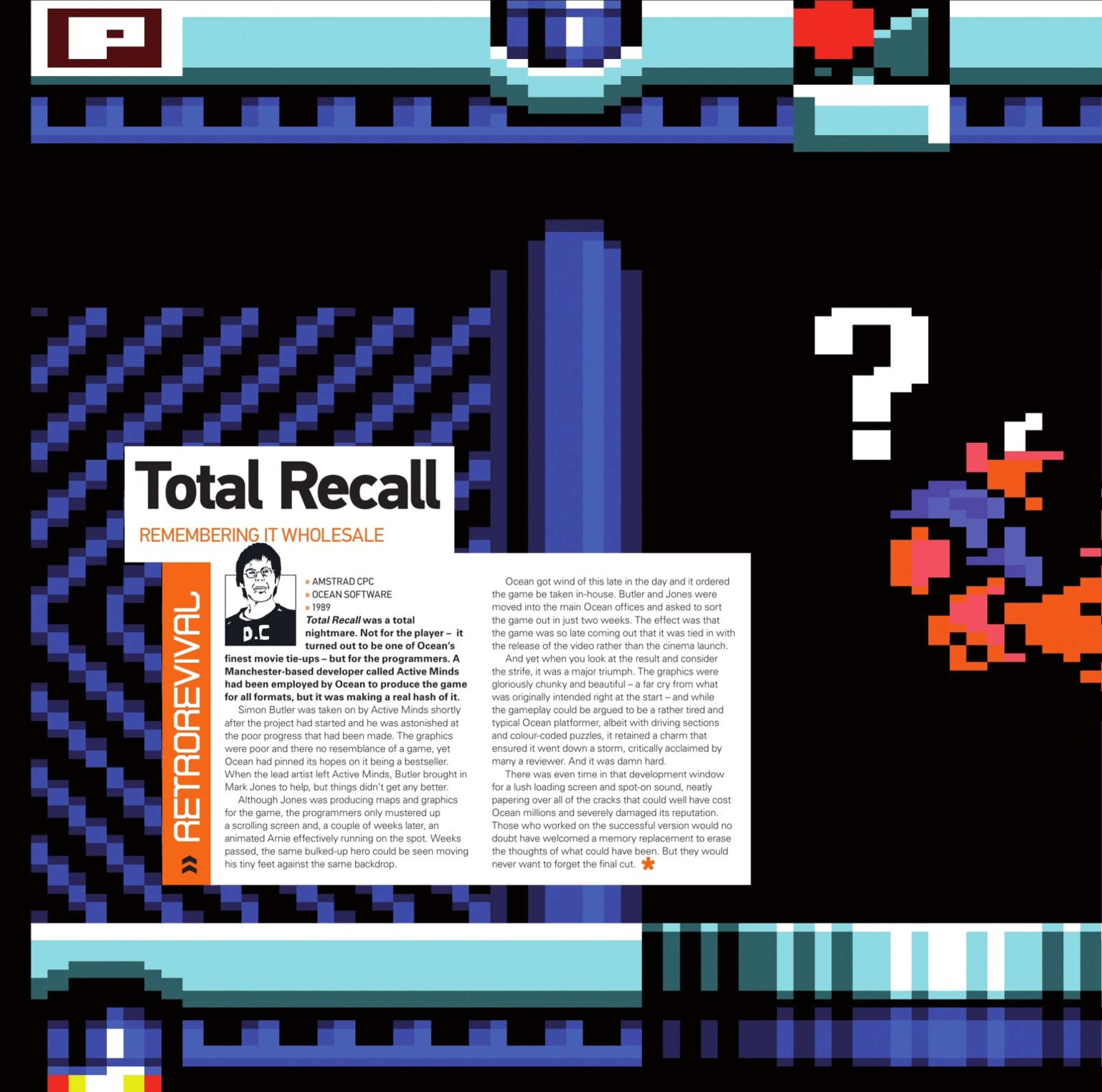
Deadlines met, production work done and a new theme song composed, there was now nothing more to do than to sit back and wait to see how the release would fare on the market. To see how the gaming public would react to *Sonic*'s first step away from the constraints of the platforming genre. Unsurprisingly, considering the level of attention and focus that Sega's spiky blue mascot had acquired since his debut in 1991, the wait for the response from fans and media was not without its own stresses.

"I knew the game would face serious acceptance challenges from *Sonic* fans and the gaming media," admits Peter. "It was just a different animal, but I think the team did a great job, all things considered. I went to Europe for the holidays just prior to the game's release, full of apprehension. This was before the internet, and I did not make any phone calls to the States while away, so it was an amazing feeling to return and learn we've sold a ton of units. Clearly, *Spinball* benefited hugely from Sonic's popularity, and I've always wished we had the time to polish it properly. It's ultimately one of those polarising games, loved by some and disliked by others, but I'm happy with its overall success and fan base."

Though the game may still not have won over some who have trouble accepting the *Sonic* franchise's expansion into the realm of spin-off gaming, it's hard to imagine anyone who worked on the title being truly displeased with the game's overall reception.

The game has been re-released numerous times and is available for play on no less than 11 different platforms. Last February it was even bestowed with the very distinct honour of having a rollercoaster named after it (see 'Sonic Spinball: The Rollercoaster' boxout), earning Sega's mascot a clear victory over a certain rotund plumber in terms of who has the best theme park ride.

In the end, if there is one lesson that can be learnt from the story of *Sonic Spinball*'s creation, it must be this: the next time you feel inclined to get upset about a production delay, next time you feel yourself getting a little impatient over the wait for a long-anticipated game, take a moment to remember that if *Sonic 3* had progressed just a little quicker, if its release had been moved up just a few short months, the world may have never got to see the unique and interesting blend of pinball and platforming that *Sonic Spinball* had to offer.



Total Recall

REMEMBERING IT WHOLESALE

» RETROREVIVAL

» AMSTRAD CPC
» OCEAN SOFTWARE
» 1989

***Total Recall* was a total nightmare. Not for the player – it turned out to be one of Ocean's finest movie tie-ups – but for the programmers. A Manchester-based developer called Active Minds had been employed by Ocean to produce the game for all formats, but it was making a real hash of it.**

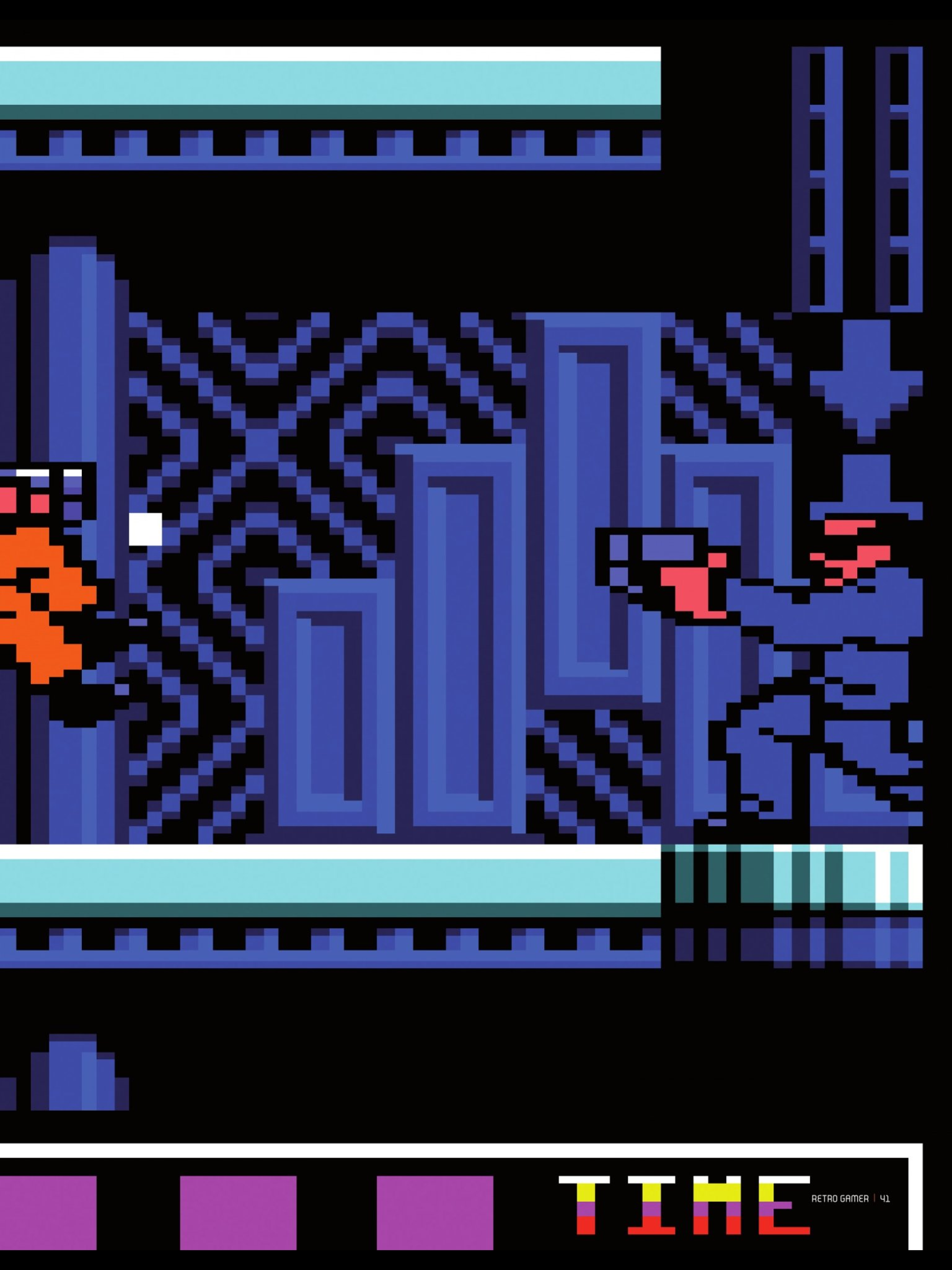
Simon Butler was taken on by Active Minds shortly after the project had started and he was astonished at the poor progress that had been made. The graphics were poor and there no resemblance of a game, yet Ocean had pinned its hopes on it being a bestseller. When the lead artist left Active Minds, Butler brought in Mark Jones to help, but things didn't get any better.

Although Jones was producing maps and graphics for the game, the programmers only mustered up a scrolling screen and, a couple of weeks later, an animated Arnie effectively running on the spot. Weeks passed, the same bulked-up hero could be seen moving his tiny feet against the same backdrop.

Ocean got wind of this late in the day and it ordered the game be taken in-house. Butler and Jones were moved into the main Ocean offices and asked to sort the game out in just two weeks. The effect was that the game was so late coming out that it was tied in with the release of the video rather than the cinema launch.

And yet when you look at the result and consider the strife, it was a major triumph. The graphics were gloriously chunky and beautiful – a far cry from what was originally intended right at the start – and while the gameplay could be argued to be a rather tired and typical Ocean platformer, albeit with driving sections and colour-coded puzzles, it retained a charm that ensured it went down a storm, critically acclaimed by many a reviewer. And it was damn hard.

There was even time in that development window for a lush loading screen and spot-on sound, neatly papering over all of the cracks that could well have cost Ocean millions and severely damaged its reputation. Those who worked on the successful version would no doubt have welcomed a memory replacement to erase the thoughts of what could have been. But they would never want to forget the final cut. *


TIME

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

RAVE RACER

■ **Developer:** Namco ■ **Year:** 1995 ■ **Genre:** Racing

■ **The *Ridge Racer* series is indelibly tied to PlayStation hardware, yet only the original 1993 coin-op was actually ported to a Sony system. The two arcade sequels, *Ridge Racer 2* and *Rave Racer*, were never granted a home conversion. For *Ridge Racer 2* this was no great shame as it was merely a multiplayer update that retained the original's course and added a few new features like a rear-view mirror and night racing. In its place, PlayStation owners received *Ridge Racer Revolution*, a more fitting follow-up that introduced a new course to skid and slide around.**

Rave Racer, meanwhile, was the proper sequel to the arcade original. It once again trotted out the short and long variations of the classic *Ridge Racer* course, but added the brand new – and brilliant – City and Mountain tracks. Once again, PlayStation owners couldn't really complain about the lack of love from Namco, as they were instead treated to *Rage Racer*, a fantastic title that introduced its own new tracks and fleshed out the gameplay with an in-depth career mode. For some, however, the concept of racing to earn credits and using them to customise cars wasn't what *Ridge Racer* should be about. The game was also rather drab-looking, with grey tones replacing the bright and breezy colours of the original.

In opting to overlook *Rave Racer*, Namco ensured that it would become one of the most notable unconverted titles in history. And it's not hard to see why, as the game is a near-perfect arcade racer that's a real buzz to play. Its two exclusive tracks are also among the best the series has to offer. City sees you thundering along a dizzying overpass that rises and dips and twists and turns like a rollercoaster. The road is five lanes wide for most of the lap, giving you ample overtaking opportunities, and the banked corners are perfect for flat-out power-sliding. Mountain is tighter and trickier but even more epic as you ride a pass that snakes its way around a rock face, through a valley and over a gorge via a series of bridges and tunnels. It's the toughest track, and finishing in first place effectively completes the game, although you can attempt time trials on all four tracks.

Namco planned to port *Rave Racer* to PCs equipped with PowerVR graphics cards in 1996, but this conversion never progressed beyond a tech demo. The City and Mountain tracks did eventually surface in the 2005 PSP launch game *Ridge Racer*, which was very nice of Namco, but it could pay fans an even greater service if an update of this 'lost' racer was to appear on Xbox Live Arcade, PSN or WiiWare.





CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

RIDGE RACER 1994

Rage Racer is the obvious substitute, but if we're talking about actual conversions it has to be the original *Ridge Racer*, which launched alongside the PlayStation in 1994. For an even more faithful-looking conversion, be sure to check out the 60fps High-Spec Demo version, which was bundled with *Ridge Racer Type 4*.

IN DEPTH



» Keep your eyes on the rear-view mirror, and get ready to block any rivals who try to slip past.

» It wouldn't be a *Ridge Racer* game without a helicopter, plane or flock of birds in the bright blue sky.

» Here, at the highest point of the Mountain track, you realise that the original *Ridge Racer* course is merely a pleasure drive.





ROBOCOP 2

■ **Developer:** Data East ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling shooter



» [Arcade] Although it only makes a cameo appearance in the movie, ED-209 features as one of the game's bosses.

■ **The home versions of the original *RoboCop* game were largely based on the Data East coin-op, yet for the hotly anticipated sequel Ocean went off and did its own thing on as many platforms as possible. The result was a mixed bag of games that were all platformers at heart, and let's face it: having the hulking Robo leap around like Mario was a bit silly really.**

For the arcade game, released a few months after the home versions, Data East took a different tack and turned out this barmy, straight-up shooter. Robo shoots punks roaming the streets, punks lurking down alleyways, punks holed up in buildings… He even gets behind the wheel and shoots punks flouting road safety rules. All this shooting is nicely effortless thanks to a nifty control system, which has separate buttons for firing in front and behind. There's a jump button too, but it's used to attack the weak points of oversized bosses rather than negotiating platforms. Topping things off is a two-player co-op mode, although bizarrely you're teamed up with a RoboCop clone rather than Murphy's partner Lewis. Despite its odd nature, Data East's take on the movie is a damn sight more fun than Ocean's rather staid home versions.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

NARC 1988



Sega's *ESWAT* is a good alternative, although it plays more like Data East's first *RoboCop* game. You're best off with *NARC*, the over-the-top shooter from Williams that was converted to home systems in 1990. As a bonus, waging war on filthy drug pushers fits perfectly with the *RoboCop 2* storyline.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SALAMANDER 1986

The closest alternative to *Thunder Cross* would be its sister title *Salamander*, as the upgrade system is comparable and, unlike *Gradius*, it features simultaneous two-player support in its arcade form. *Salamander* also adds vertically scrolling sections, which add some welcome variety to the proceedings.

THUNDER CROSS

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1988 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] Shoot the core and sent this boss straight back to *Gradius*!

■ **Konami's side-scrolling shooters were always hugely popular in the arcades, with key titles like *Gradius* and *Salamander* receiving sequels, spin-offs and, of course, conversions to home systems. Yet this example, which is actually set in the *Gradius* universe, was curiously ignored.**

We can only assume that prospective developers considered it too much of a technical challenge to shoehorn *Thunder Cross* onto the 8-bit systems of the day, as it's a visually stunning shooter that features detailed, multi-layered backgrounds and end-of-level bosses that fill the screen. Furthermore, your tiny ship can be upgraded into a formidable killing machine, with up to four bolt-ons unleashing lasers, flames and bombs that obliterate everything in their path. It's spectacular stuff, and it gets more and more manic as you blaze through the game's seven stages.

Thunder Cross eventually made it home in 2007 with a budget port to the PlayStation 2. Disappointingly, it was only available in Japan, but raises hopes that the game may receive a wider release in the future.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

GUARDIANS OF THE 'HOOD

■ **Developer:** Atari ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **We can't work out who was the craziest person in this whole mess: the designer who came up with the idea of taking *Pit-Fighter* and turning it into a scrolling beat-'em-up, or the Atari Games executive who gave the game the green light.**

The well-worn story goes that a bunch of uncouth youths have taken over your once-peaceful neighbourhood, and you – plus a couple of pals, if you can find anyone willing to stump up the credits – must bang some heads and clean up the streets. Cue lots of confusion and unintentional comedy as deformed-looking characters spasm around the screen, trying to punch and kick each other. It really is the pits and shows how creatively bankrupt Atari had become by the early Nineties.

Thankfully the game was never allowed to contaminate home systems, and when you consider how ropey the ports of *Pit-Fighter* were – the SNES version ranks as one of the sorriest games ever created – this was a very fortunate thing indeed.





FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Virgin Games Part 2

In 1991, Virgin Mastertronic lost its MD and much of its staff to Sega. It needed a new direction, and former US Gold supremo Tim Chaney was the man to do it. Richard Hewison concludes the Virgin Games saga…

Tim Chaney joined US Gold in 1985 from Commodore, and when he left it was the biggest software publisher in Europe.

"I'd left US Gold in April 1989 feeling that my job there was done," explains Tim. "I wanted to do something new and more entrepreneurial, so I hooked up with Anton Bruehl and Manlio Allegra to form TecMagik, with the intention of publishing Sega games."

TecMagik quickly signed the rights to publish Master System conversions of popular games *Pac-Mania*, *Populous* and *Shadow Of The Beast*. The company was doing well when Virgin Mastertronic's Frank Herman approached Tim in early 1991 with the idea of him replacing the departing Nick Alexander as the next MD of Virgin Games.

"I wasn't that keen initially," admits Tim, "because it meant going back into a corporate life, even though Virgin was still considered to be cool and rock and roll." Despite his reservations, he met with Frank Herman and Virgin Communications' chairman Robert Devereux.

"I liked Robert a lot and I think he liked me," says Tim, "and they offered me the job of running Virgin Games, which had around 20 employees and a small income target of about $1 million for the next financial year."

After a few months of courting, Tim was a little reluctant to commit, and so another meeting was arranged. He travelled down from Birmingham to London for lunch in Notting Hill and remembers very clearly what Robert Devereux said when they met.

"He basically asked me, 'Are you joining us or not?'" Put on the spot, Tim had to make a decision: "I said, 'Yes I will, but I have a few things I need to do first.'" The offer was left open for six months and Virgin eventually got its man.

INSTANT EXPERT

The author of this article is listed as a KGB agent in the end credits for *KGB* (or *Conspiracy*, as it is known on CD-ROM). He also wrote the manuals for *Caesars Palace* on the Sega Game Gear, *Reach For The Skies* and *Dino Dini's Goal!*, bug-tested many other VIE games, and edited the digitised speech samples for *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars*.

The name Virgin was associated with computer games from 1983 until 2009 – a staggering run of 26 years. The company was split up a few times, and sold to a number of different owners. Richard Branson's involvement ceased in 1994, but in 2010 he returned with Virgin Gaming – an online service that allows PS3 and Xbox 360 game players to challenge each other head-to-head for cash prizes. Only time will tell if this venture is a success or not.

Industry opinion felt that had Virgin Games been left alone to its own devices without any corporate interference from American companies, it would have either completely imploded upon itself or it would be where Electronic Arts is now.

The Mirror cracked

Tim Chaney officially joined in December 1991 and had what he saw as an instant stroke of good luck, thanks to the demise of a rival publisher.

"At that time, Mirrorsoft was in the process of disintegrating," explains Tim, referring to owner Robert Maxwell's death on 5 November 1991 and the repercussions that followed. Along with a number of other businesses in the Mirror Group, Mirrorsoft was shut down in early 1992, making its employees redundant. Mirrorsoft's sales and marketing director Sean Brennan soon became Tim's first recruitment target.

"I had spoken to Tim beforehand about a possible position at Virgin," remembers Sean, "but we didn't discuss it in any meaningful way until CES in Las Vegas."

After initial discussions around the roulette tables in Tim's hotel in early January '92, Sean had an interview in London with Robert Devereux, which resulted in him clinching the post of deputy managing director for Europe.

"Sean was and still is one of the best sales and marketing guys in the business. Just look at what he's done at Bethesda!" exclaims Tim. "So we really were starting off on the right foot from day one".

Other ex-Mirrorsoft employees were soon recruited, and the Mirrorsoft

COOL SPOT

“We had a totally different mentality and were hell bent for glory”

TIM CHANEY EXPLAINING HIS APPROACH TO RUNNING VIRGIN GAMES



connections also helped Virgin sign up a string of quality products in varying stages of development, including *Lure Of The Temptress*, *Reach For The Skies*, *Apocalypse*, *Cannon Fodder*, *Alien 3* and a number of Sega Master System and Mega Drive conversions. Coupled with titles already in development under the previous regime – notably *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* from Archer Maclean – they gave the company a very strong line-up.

“I wouldn't say it gave us a running start, because obviously the company had been going for many years under Nick Alexander,” says Tim, “but what those people and those products allowed us to do was introduce a new wave of energy, ambition and aggression.”

The result was that, within a year, Virgin Games was performing better than ever in a market that had changed due to the emergence of the 8 and 16-bit consoles.

“Instead of reaching our $1 million target by the end of our first year, we hit £13.4 million, mainly because we sold tons of Sega games,” recalls Tim with justifiable pride. “Someone once said to me that the best thing that happened to Virgin was a fat bloke falling off his boat, and they weren't far wrong!”

Going for Gold

Tim Chaney's running of Virgin Games was very different from the approach that Nick Alexander had taken, but in many ways it had to be.

“We had a totally different mentality and were hell bent for glory,” explains Tim. “Sean was aggressive as hell, and in those days I was still thinking that we could take over the world – and we nearly did!” he adds, laughing.

The Virgin bosses also gave Tim all the support he needed. “The few times I had to get Robert Devereux to sign off on a very expensive deal, the worst thing he ever said to me was, ‘I wouldn't do it, but you do it if you want to,’ which shows the faith they had in me,” he says gratefully.

The next phase in Virgin Games' rebirth was instigated by a desire to make the company the best in the business.

“When you're trying to build a new company that's aggressive, you look for the largest, softest, most arrogant, lazy target, and from my perspective that was US Gold at the time,” admits Tim. US Gold had just gone public in 1993, and Tim went for its developers, then cherry-picked some of the staff. And then he went after the biggest prize of all: LucasArts. US Gold had been associated with George Lucas's games division for a long time, and it took a lot of effort to sign it.

“I made a beeline for LucasArts. Sean didn't think we'd get them and I didn't know whether we would or not, but I was going to give it a go,” admits Tim.

“I remember being on a flight to the States where I spent half the journey writing an eight-page proposal for the deal,

BY THE NUMBERS

3 – *Dino Dini's Goal!* was *Kick Off 3* in everything but name.

11 – *The 11th Hour*, follow-up to *The 7th Guest*, was an expensive flop when it was released in 1995, inflicting a serious financial wound to Trilobyte.

20 – The approximate number of employees working at Virgin when Tim Chaney became MD in 1991.

200 – The approximate number of people working in the VIE US office when Viacom closed it down in 1998.

1,000,000 – The approximate number of copies sold of Westwood's *Blade Runner* game

4,500,000 – The estimated number of units that Virgin's adaptation of Disney's *The Lion King* sold on consoles

$10,000,000 – The size of guarantee that Virgin Interactive paid for the rights to develop *The Lion King*

$250,000,000 – How much Blockbuster paid for Virgin Interactive Entertainment in 1994



» (Left) VIE staff enjoying their work, including Diarmid Clarke, Mike Merren, Jon Norledge, Matt Spall, Peter Hickman and Sacha Anthony.



WORK HARD, PARTY HARD

Trade paper *MCV* paid tribute to VIE in 2005, asking former staff for their anecdotes.

"Virgin was a brilliant place to work," said Louise Gaynor.

"It was like riding a motorbike without a helmet," explained Rob McGrath, and Matt Spall revealed: "There are bars in Kensington where old employees are still recognised, and probably still barred!"

Did VIE really enjoy themselves that much? Sean Brennan remembers "too much partying", while Mike Merren says: "If there was one weakness it was that we didn't evolve from that party mentality as the industry became more professional."

which I wish I could find now because it was a bloody masterpiece!" he chuckles. His hard work and persistence paid off, because Virgin ultimately became LucasArts' new European distributor.

The advantages of getting it was obvious. "You get a massive profile and some great products when you work with LucasArts," explains Tim. The deal included the *Star Wars* PC games *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*, *Dark Forces*, *Rebel Assault II*, and a number of other triple-A titles spread across a range of formats. "I think it also enticed Simon Jeffrey to leave EA and work for us, and he was a game-changer," adds Tim.

Others were also attracted to the bold and brash new-look Virgin Games, including the 3D racing simulation expert Papyrus, GT Interactive, Maxis, Hudsonsoft, Capcom and JVC.

"In Europe we had this substantial bolt-on distribution business," explains Tim. "We were the number one distributor in Germany, and in the top two for France and the UK. When you look for distribution you look for a company that will treat you fairly, that has decent terms, flexibility, and someone who has huge power at retail, and that's what we had."

The 7th Guest

Virgin Games' US office was set up by Mastertronic co-founder Martin Alper in 1986, initially to distribute Commodore 64 games, but its role in Virgin Games' emergence as a real force was due in part to a curiously titled CD-ROM game.

"What our American office did was publish *The 7th Guest*, which was one of the first truly interactive CD-ROM games," says Tim. Former Virgin Games US employees Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros set up their own studio, Trilobyte, specifically so that they could develop *The 7th Guest* for Virgin to publish. The game was set in a spooky mansion and featured digitised video footage intermixed with rendered graphics. The gameplay was based around exploration and solving logic puzzles.

"It really was groundbreaking at the time," explains Tim. "I remember even Richard [Branson] coming down to my office to be photographed with the box."

Virgin held a huge press launch for the game in the UK, and its PR executive Caroline Stokes recalls the launch: "We chose a fantastic, lived-in mansion called the Manor House in Hertfordshire to host the event. It was stunning and completely in keeping with the game." Some of the attendees were flown in by helicopter, while others were driven to the venue. They were then placed in different parts of the mansion to have pre-dinner drinks and a meal.

"Hired actors played out the 'experiential' part of the event, which was to solve a puzzle in a similar way to the game, with ghosts, ghouls and dead people scattered around," continues Caroline. "The guests had to hunt for clues around the mansion, going to the attic, the stables, the kitchens and so on. Guests who thought it was a private affair soon bumped into more guests from other parts of the house, and it was a real hoot."

The end of the launch culminated in copies of the game being presented to the guests. "We were told by many of the

> **"We had 13 consecutive campaigns banned by the Advertising Standards Authority"**
>
> TIM CHANEY REVELS IN VIE'S NOTORIOUS ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

TIMELINE

- **1991** TIM CHANEY JOINS VIRGIN GAMES IN DECEMBER AS THE NEW MD
- **1992** NEW RECRUITS AND PRODUCTS FROM THE REMAINS OF MIRRORSOFT SIGN UP WITH VIRGIN
- **1992** TIM CHANEY SIGNS WITH LUCASARTS FOR EUROPEAN SALES AND DISTRIBUTION RIGHTS
- **1992** VIRGIN GAMES BUYS WESTWOOD ASSOCIATES AND RENAMES IT WESTWOOD STUDIOS
- **1993** TIM CHANEY SIGNS EUROPEAN DISTRIBUTION RIGHTS TO *DOOM II* AT E3 SHOW
- **1993** VIRGIN GAMES RELEASES *THE 7TH GUEST* AND *DUNE* ON CD-ROM
- **1993** WESTWOOD STUDIOS' *DUNE II* IS RELEASED
- **1993** VIRGIN GAMES RENAMES TO VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- **1994** VIE IS SOLD TO BLOCKBUSTER FOR $250 MILLION
- **1994** VIE BECOMES PART OF VIACOM AFTER VIACOM BUYS BLOCKBUSTER
- **1995** WESTWOOD STUDIOS' *COMMAND & CONQUER* RELEASED
- **1996** REVOLUTION SOFTWARE'S *BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS* RELEASED
- **1996** VIRGIN IN TROUBLE WITH THE ASA AGAIN FOR ITS *SCREAMER 2* ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN
- **1998** VIACOM SELLS WESTWOOD STUDIOS TO ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **1998** TIM CHANEY AND MARK DYNE NEGOTIATE AN MBO FROM VIACOM
- **1999** INTERPLAY EUROPE AND VIE EUROPE MERGE IN FEBRUARY
- **1999** VIE IS BOUGHT BY TITUS IN DECEMBER

people that it was the best event they'd ever attended," remembers Caroline.

The 7th Guest was considered a huge gamble at the time, as CD-ROM was very expensive to develop for and PC CD-ROM drives weren't that common and typically cost £200-300 to buy. However, the gamble paid off, resulting in sales of over 2 million copies for the IBM PC. Virgin also licensed the game to Philips for release on the CD-i console.

The sleeper awakens

Virgin struck up working relationships with a number of developers to encourage CD-ROM development. This included signing French team Cryo Interactive to produce a game based on Frank Herbert's epic science-fiction novel, *Dune*.

Dune was primarily a graphic adventure, with a few strategic elements. Initially released on floppy disk for the PC and Amiga, it was spruced up and released on CD-ROM the following year, with footage from David Lynch's 1984 movie, new graphics sequences and in-game speech.

It was a success, and Cryo went on to produce an original graphic adventure called *KGB* in the same year. Set in Moscow in August 1991, the player assumed the role of a KGB agent assigned to investigate the murder of a former agent turned private detective. As with *Dune*, *KGB* was also given additional material for CD-ROM, featuring footage of Canadian actor Donald Sutherland – complete with dodgy Russian accent – offering advice to the player in the role of the protagonist's dead father. However, by the time the CD-ROM version was ready to be released, it had undergone a change of name, as Tim explains: "Although we were very happy to fly in the face of controversy in Europe, the US office wouldn't release the game with the title *KGB*, so they renamed it *Conspiracy*."

Cryo went on to develop one further CD-ROM graphic adventure for Virgin in 1995. *Lost Eden* was a typically offbeat game, set in a mythical world with humans and talking dinosaurs.

The final step in Virgin Games' early transformation was the change of name from Virgin Games to Virgin Interactive Entertainment, shortened by many to VIE.

2002 TIM CHANEY NEGOTIATES AN MBO FROM TITUS FOR VIE SPAIN IN MAY, RENAMED TO VIRGIN PLAY

2003 TITUS AND VIE REBRAND AS AVALON INTERACTIVE

2005 AVALON INTERACTIVE CLOSES DOWN

2008 TIM CHANEY LEAVES VIRGIN PLAY AFTER BUSINESS DIFFERENCES WITH PRIVATE INVESTORS

2009 VIRGIN PLAY GOES INTO LIQUIDATION

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Tim Chaney
Tim Chaney started as a sales manager at Commodore UK in 1982 and then joined US Gold in 1985. Four years later he set up Sega publisher TecMagik, before being enticed to become MD at Virgin Games in late 1991. Several owners and a change of company name later, Tim engineered an MBO from Viacom in 1998, and merged with Interplay Europe. Another MBO resulted in Virgin Interactive Spain becoming Virgin Play. Tim left Virgin Play to set up Zattikka in 2009 with Yahoo Europe CEO Mark Opzoomer, producing social networking games, mobile games and internet games. Tim is also planning to have his autobiography, *Luton Boy*, published in 2011.

Sean Brennan
Sean worked for Telecomsoft and Mirrorsoft before arriving at Virgin Games in 1992. After leaving in 1998, Sean joined Interplay Europe before returning to VIE when the companies merged in 1999. After Titus bought Interplay and VIE, Sean went to Interactive Media Partners and then set up Europlay Capital Advisers with Mark Dyne. He was then CEO at Blast Entertainment, and is currently managing director at Bethesda Europe, publisher of *Fallout 3*.

Caroline Stokes
Caroline went from VIE to Sony in 1994 to work on the launch of the original PlayStation console in Europe. Today she works for Natural Selection, a company that headhunts talent in digital media, including games and social media online.

Richard Branson
Richard Branson launched Virgin Games in January 1983 after Nick Alexander's suggestion. In 1991 a sizeable chunk of Virgin Mastertronic was sold to Sega Europe. The remainder of the company was eventually sold to Blockbuster for $250 million in July 1994. In summer 2010, Richard Branson announced a return to games with a new company called Virgin Gaming.

Caroline Stokes

Richard Branson

Tim Chaney


Sean Brennan

Tim remembers the thinking behind the decision: "The change in name was made to position the company for the CD-ROM business explosion, which was interactive. There was nothing wrong with the Games brand, but the word 'game' was considered a bit lowbrow – unlike today – and it was a bit too Eighties!"

Rubbing the lamp

VIE's strong performance in the US with *The 7th Guest* opened many doors across the Atlantic, including the chance to work with the software division at Disney on the official videogames for *Aladdin*, *The Lion King* and *The Jungle Book*.

Aladdin featured animation drawn by the actual Disney artists and used a technique called Digicell, which compressed the animation frames so they would fit into the relatively small space allocated to the Mega Drive's game cartridge.

The finished product was a hugely enjoyable platform game that won a string of awards, was bundled with the Mega Drive console, and generated over $100 million in revenue for VIE. That last fact persuaded *Aladdin* programmer David Perry to leave Virgin's US office and set up his own development company, Shiny Entertainment, so he could get more of the financial rewards, developing properties like *Earthworm Jim* and *MDK*.

Associating with Westwood

Las Vegas-based developer Westwood Associates was founded by Brett Sperry and Louis Castle in 1985. The company





» [Mega Drive] Programmer David Perry remembers McDonald's asking where the hamburgers were in joint venture *Mick And Mack: Global Gladiators*.

“Richard Branson is always one for knowing when to sell”

TIM CHANEY EXPLAINING WHY VIE WAS SOLD TO BLOCKBUSTER IN 1994

made an impression with the first two *Eye Of The Beholder* RPGs for SSI, and in the early Nineties it began working for Virgin Games on *Dune II*, which was a real-time strategy game.

VIE was so impressed with Westwood that it sought to buy the company. It had a rival bidder in Sierra, but the appeal of the Virgin brand and the fact that the co-founders retained a slice of the business swung the decision in VIE's favour. The name changed to Westwood Studios, and it then enjoyed its most productive and successful period, releasing the *Legend Of Kyrandia* graphic adventures, the *Lands Of Lore* RPGs, and the ultimate real-time action strategy series: *Command & Conquer*.

Westwood and Virgin also produced successful console titles including *Young Merlin* and Disney's *The Lion King*, which was written in a tight seven months for the Sega Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo. Development on *The Lion King* was fraught with tight deadlines and late changes to the movie, which was developed in parallel with the game. As with Virgin's previous Disney release, the Mega Drive version was bundled with the console upon release, and it sold over 4 million copies worldwide.

Westwood didn't stop there. It developed *Monopoly* for the PC, a Windows port of Capcom's hugely successful *Resident Evil*, and in 1997 it worked on one final graphic adventure for VIE. Based in the same world as the classic sci-fi movie, Westwood's *Blade Runner* game was played in real-time, adding new characters to the universe. It was a critical and financial success and proved to be a key title in VIE's armoury. The European advert for *Blade Runner* showed a prostrate replicant and the words: 'I had to get this guy out of my hair, my fingernails, my carpet…' The advert caused a fair amount of controversy, something that VIE was already used to.

Offal PR

Virgin's aggressive advertising for some of its releases often got it in the news headlines for the wrong reasons.



» [PC] Christopher Lloyd in *Toonstruck*, doing an audition for *I'm A Celebrity… Get Me Out Of Here.*



» The European distribution rights for *Doom II* proved to be a coup for Virgin in its new VIE guise.

"We weren't scared of anybody and didn't care what people thought of what we did," remarks Tim. An early example of VIE's approach to advertising can be found when it distributed *Doom II* for GTI and id Software in Europe.

"Because we were wacky Virgin, we got away with delivering Jiffy Bags of offal to computer magazine editors to promote *Doom II*," says Tim with a grin. "Although one editor was a vegan and turned up at our Ladbroke Grove office, so I introduced him to Sean and left them to it!"

Later examples of VIE's brand of PR included the 'Best High Scores' campaign for *Command & Conquer*, which caused a minor international incident when Jacques Chirac was shown alongside Hitler, Mussolini, Saddam Hussein and many others on billboard posters advertising the new game.

"Someone had to put a huge white sticker over Chirac's face after complaints were received from the French embassy," explains Tim. Virgin also used a photo of Hitler addressing the Nuremberg Rally in an advert saying, 'Thanks a million' when *Command & Conquer* sold a million copies. "That upset the Jewish community a tad," reflects Tim.

VIE's advert for Capcom's first *Resident Evil* game featured a bath full of real blood spilling over onto a white-tiled floor, and a large 48-sheet poster version adorned VIE's new offices in Kensington Square for a while in 1996.

That same year, the Minister for Road Safety complained to the Advertising Standards Authority after seeing a poster for VIE's racing game, *Screamer 2*, which showed a teenage joyrider while saying: 'Speed's the buzz. Smash anything that gets in your way.' The minister alleged that the advert glamorised joyriding, and

SIX OF THE BEST



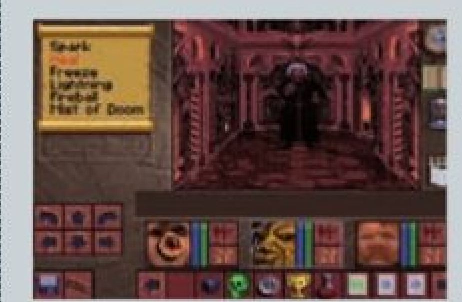
Dune II (Westwood Studios)

An outstanding and frenetic real-time strategy game set in Frank Herbert's incredible novels. Westwood hit upon the basics of a gaming system that sowed the seeds for something much bigger just a few years later.



Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars (Revolution Software)

Revolution started with *Lure Of The Temptress*, advanced to *Beneath A Steel Sky* and then started hitting the home runs with *Broken Sword*.



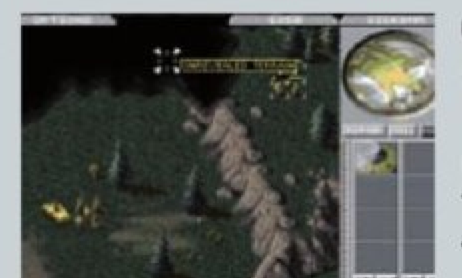
Lands Of Lore: The Throne Of Chaos (Westwood Studios)

The first *Lands Of Lore* was a gorgeous RPG, with huge maps, challenging monsters, tricky puzzles and, on the CD-ROM version, some serious voice acting talent thanks to Patrick Stewart.



TIE Fighter (LucasArts)

VIE distributed this throughout Europe. Although *X-Wing* was brilliant, it was also very hard. *TIE Fighter* was a little easier, and it featured better graphics than its predecessor. Fighting for the Empire had never been as engrossing as this before.



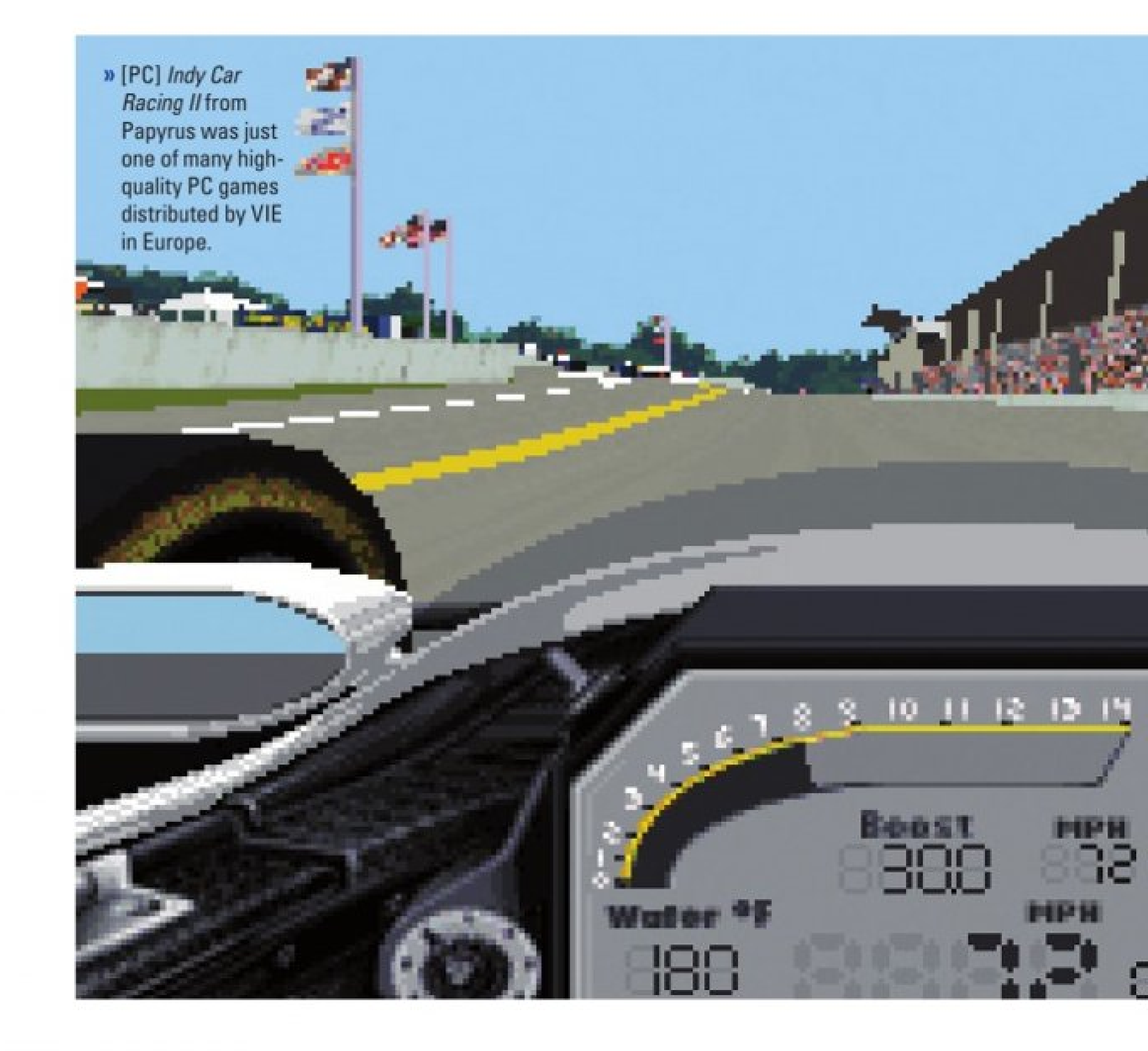
Command & Conquer (Westwood Studios)

C&C launched with 160,000 pre-orders in the UK and sailed past 1 million in no time. An improved interface over *Dune II* and some terrific strategy action ensured *C&C* a place in gaming history.



Screamer 2 (Milestone)

The sequel to *Screamer* upped the stakes regarding the graphics, and it had a nice split-screen option. Sound effects were good, the courses spread across different countries, and the deep controls made this a surprisingly good PC racing game.



» [PC] *Indy Car Racing II* from Papyrus was just one of many high-quality PC games distributed by VIE in Europe.


» [Mega Drive] *Aladdin* was a huge hit for VIE and Disney Software across a wide variety of formats, including the PC.


» Viacom's multi-billionaire owner Sumner Redstone (right) with Tim Chaney at E3 1996.

the campaign was pulled two and a half weeks later.

"We had 13 consecutive campaigns banned by the Advertising Standards Authority, and then everyone else tried to emulate what we were doing," laughs Tim. Sean Brennan also remembers that he spent a lot of his time at Virgin "inventing new ways to annoy the ASA".

VIE published *Street Fighter EX* for the Sony PlayStation in late 1997, and the poster campaign for Capcom's fighting game encouraged people to shout out 'northern gits' or 'southern poofs' depending on which part of the country they were in.

Once again, the ASA received complaints, particularly from the 'pink press', as VIE's Danielle Woodyatt recalls: "That particular advert pissed a lot of people off!" Danielle also remembers another advert that made a few people squirm: "The *Worms World Party* poster campaign showed a worm being removed from someone's backside on an operating table." Lovely!

Spelling test

By 1994, VIE Europe had grown from a business only expected to make $1 million in 1991 to a company rapidly heading for an estimated $150 million, and this made Virgin's management sit up and take notice once again.

"Richard Branson is always one for knowing when to sell," explains Tim, "and he saw our success as an opportunity to make some pretty decent money." The Virgin Group and the VIE management then got the business into shape for a proposed initial public offering (IPO) in the US, turning it into a publicly traded company.

"What we did was put out a 'red herring', which wasn't the prospectus for a public offering but was, if you like, the beta version of that document that people could have prior access to," remembers Tim. "Following that, we had Hasbro and Blockbuster knocking on the door. Hasbro moved fast, and were willing to put in a small investment of around $20 million. Then Blockbuster came along and wanted the whole thing, valuing the business at $250 million."

VIE was sold to Blockbuster in July 1994. What this meant for Hasbro was that it held its newly acquired stock for just a couple of months and then, incredibly, doubled its investment.

"Blockbuster was huge and had a load of money at the time," recalls Tim, "and I think it was CD-ROM and Disney that made us attractive. This was back when CD-ROM was supposed to take over as the new media from music and film."

VIE was put under the wing of Spelling Entertainment, which was part-owned by Blockbuster. Aaron Spelling made hit TV shows in the US, including *Charlie's Angels*, *Starsky & Hutch* and *Dynasty*, "so we reported to a bunch of guys in Hollywood," says Tim, wryly. However, it wasn't long before Blockbuster was itself bought by media giant Viacom.

Viacom woes

Being part of Viacom wasn't a happy experience for VIE. The company had plenty of solid products and maintained a high number of releases across all the popular formats – including the emerging Sony PlayStation console – but it soon became obvious that it didn't really have a strategic fit with its new owner. It spent more and more of Viacom's money and quickly fell out of favour. Having already had its fingers burnt with Viacom New Media – its attempt to enter the videogames market that failed, costing the company $100 million in the process – the owners became less enamoured with VIE as the months rolled by.

"Gradually more and more Viacom people were eased into our ranks," remembers Tim. "They completely ran the US office in no time at all, but Europe remained a problem for them."

The ace in Tim's pocket in Europe was his close relationship with Capcom, which had provided VIE with the distribution rights to the very successful *Resident Evil* series.

This game is not in any way endorsed by the ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

POPPY CONTROVERSY

Sensible Software's *Cannon Fodder* found itself in hot water with a national newspaper, MPs and the Royal British Legion following its intention to use the image of a poppy. The game was previewed at a computer show in 1993, and this led to some severe criticism, which forced Virgin to remove the poppy image from the box art, although it remained on the loading screen with a disclaimer saying that it was not in any way endorsed by the Royal British Legion.

Despite Virgin's tendency to court controversy, Tim Chaney decided to get the offending box artwork amended. At the time he was quoted as saying: "In the cold light of day, I don't want to upset anybody, especially the people that this could upset."

Sensible Software co-founder Jon Hare recalls the incident very clearly: "The Royal British Legion told us that it was offensive to the war dead to use it in a game. They obviously didn't play the game to see the context within which it was used. They also told the *Daily Star*, and they then asked us to give them £500. We felt this was a kind of threat, but we paid them the money and they never mentioned it again."

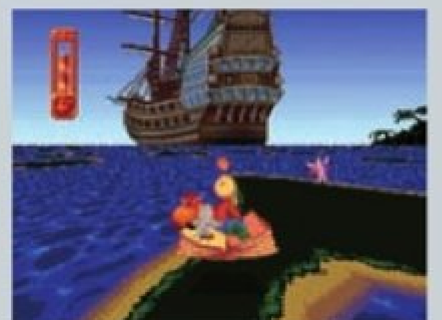
THREE TO AVOID



Toonstruck (VIE US)
It probably sounded like a great idea on paper. A *Roger Rabbit*-style animated cartoon point-and-click adventure game with a 'real' central character played by Christopher Lloyd. It's really a shame that, with a $10 million budget, VIE forgot to put a game in there worth playing.



Iron Assault (Graffiti)
Nick-named '*Iron Insult*' by the upper echelons at VIE, this *MechWarrior* wannabe from Graffiti for the PC started badly with a cringeworthy stop-motion animation intro and cheesy voiceover. Once in the game proper, things didn't really improve.



The Pagemaster (Probe)
Remember that kid from *Home Alone*? He starred in a fantasy movie in the early Nineties called *The Pagemaster*, with Christopher Lloyd. Ah, him again. Probe coded this SNES game for Fox Interactive, which VIE distributed in Europe, but it was let down by poor controls.



» Mark Dyne and Tim Chaney successfully negotiated with Viacom for a management buyout of VIE Europe in 1998.



» [Mega Drive] Probe's *Alien 3* landed at Virgin Games after Mirrorsoft fell into administration.

"More and more Viacom people were eased into our ranks. They ran the US office in no time at all"

TIM CHANEY ON THE BEGINNING OF THE END

"They couldn't sell the European business without Capcom being on board because that relationship was a huge money maker, while most of the US product – with the obvious exception of Westwood's *Command & Conquer* – was losing money," says Tim.

The turning point for Tim and VIE came at a Viacom senior management meeting in Los Angeles where all of Viacom's companies, including Paramount, Blockbuster and VIE, presented their business plans for 1998.

"Our plan called for $90 million more cash. Viacom owner Sumner Redstone said to me, 'Good luck with your plan,' as we left the room, but I'm sure that once we were out of earshot he was saying, 'Get rid of them.'"

The end result was that Tim, Martin Alper, Brett Sperry and COO Tom Allen spent the next 16 months on and off looking for a buyer, talking to MicroProse, Electronic Arts and GTI. They came close to a deal with GTI, but it fell through at the last minute.

"Our problem was that we were a real oddball compared to everybody else," explains Tim. "All of the major companies in the business at the time had 75 per cent of their revenues from the US and 25 per cent from Europe, and we were the reverse. We had this potent European distribution business and a weakening American office that had something like 200 people working in development, bellowing cash on products that weren't making any money."

Producer Mike Merren, who had originally joined VIE in 1992 from the ashes of Mirrorsoft, found the situation unsettling: "There was a heck of a lot of turmoil at the company. It was up for sale, individual projects were also up for sale, and nobody really knew what was going to happen next."

Sean Brennan got so fed up with dealing with Viacom that he left VIE in 1998 to join his ex-boss Peter Bilotta at Interplay Europe. Even the external developers felt disenchanted with the American owners, as Charles Cecil of Revolution Software recalls: "No reflection on the UK people, but once Viacom got involved it all became quite nasty."

All change again

Having failed to find a buyer for the whole business, Viacom decided to sell VIE's greatest single asset, Westwood Studios, to Electronic Arts, depriving VIE of one of its major revenue streams. Due to the precarious situation VIE found itself in with Viacom, LucasArts also felt that it had no choice but to move on, signing a multi-territory publishing and distribution partnership with Activision.

"That left us with a US business with no product, which Viacom razed to the ground in less than a week," elaborates Tim, "and a European side with its substantial distribution business, which had been deprived of 50 per cent of its publishing revenue."

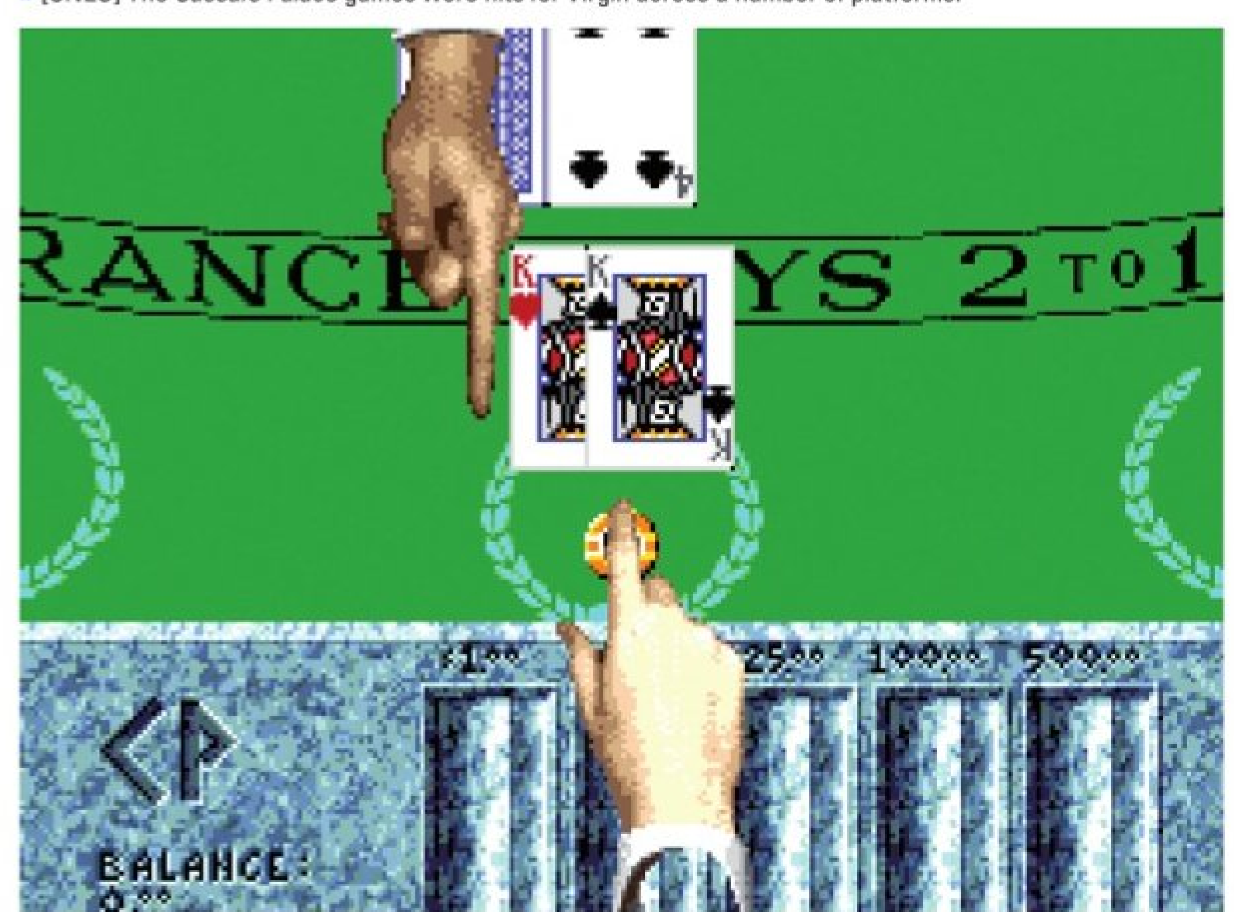
Without Westwood and LucasArts, the European business was no longer in any fit state to stand on its own. Tim had to act and act fast, so he brought in friend and business associate Mark Dyne to



» [PC] Cryo's *Dune* adventure strategy game was spruced up for the CD-ROM release to include video and rendered flights over Arrakis.



» [PC] *Doom II* would have been distributed by US Gold, but VIE bagged the rights at the very death.



» [SNES] The *Caesars Palace* games were hits for Virgin across a number of platforms.

DOOMED TOO!

VIE signed up the European distribution rights to *Doom II* in literally the final hour of E3 in 1993, stealing it from under the nose of US Gold. Tim Chaney learnt that GTI and US Gold had agreed on a deal, and decided to act fast.

"I heard about it one hour before the end of the show from an agent. I asked him if he could get me in front of GTI now! He did, and I offered GTI a much better royalty rate than US Gold had, and we shook on it. Geoff Brown believed he left E3 with *Doom II*. By the time he landed back in the UK he found out that he hadn't!"

VIE did such a good job of selling *Doom II* in Europe that GTI decided to have a bigger say and set up its own UK office. "That wasn't the first time that happened in my career," reflects Tim.

successfully help repackage the company and negotiate a management buyout from Viacom. Mark subsequently became CEO at VIE until late 1999.

"It was a strange, heady and sometimes scary one, because Viacom actually paid us $15 million, which we reinvested as new capital, to take it away!" recounts Tim. "We signed a piece of paper completely indemnifying Viacom from any past or future responsibilities, then within three months we merged VIE with Interplay".

Interplay's European business and VIE worked well together. VIE needed more product and Interplay needed the distribution side of the business, so the two companies shared a common purpose and gelled quite quickly. By coincidence, Sean Brennan was working at Interplay and so Sean and Tim were reunited one last time, working alongside Peter Bilotta in the new company.

"People said that our egos would clash and Peter and I wouldn't last a month as co-presidents, but we played to our strengths and it all worked out fine," remembers Tim.

"That first year we turned a small profit around from a loss," he remembers, "and then in late '99 Titus came in to buy us after buying control of Interplay in the summer." As before, things were not particularly smooth for VIE during this latest uncertain period.

"Titus basically didn't do very thorough due diligence," explains Tim. "They didn't realise that Interplay and VIE were locked in for seven years, so they had to buy us too because we had the golden share, owning 50.1 per cent of the company."

Tim's opinion of Titus and how it handled buying Interplay and VIE remains mixed: "I liked the Caen brothers who owned Titus, but they were full of themselves and they really believed that they could do no wrong. Once they took over, my responsibilities were marginalised to the point where I didn't really care any more."

Peter Bilotta soon left, as did Sean Brennan, and VIE was starting to disintegrate. By then, Tim was living in Spain and working in the Madrid office. He had got married to a local Spanish girl and was starting a family. He was still on the Titus payroll, but he freely admits that he wasn't working very hard.

When Tim was asked to reduce the staffing levels by 25 per cent he refused, then came back with a counter offer to buy Virgin Spain outright by swapping the 'golden parachute' payment he would have received had he left. Titus agreed, and Tim and colleague Francisco Encinas ended up owning VIE Spain, which they renamed Virgin Play.

The company remained a distributor until 2006. "That was when we started moving into publishing because I found distribution tedious!" laughs Tim. The portfolio was expanded, signing up Real Madrid and *Pocoyo*, lining up Barcelona, and negotiating with the Spanish national football team for an official game in time for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

By mid-2008, Tim had raised 7.2 million euros from institutional investors. "I was pumping up the business, waiting for a big media company to move in and buy us," explains Tim. Unfortunately, the economic meltdown arrived and the banks called in their unsecured loans when they fell due. Virgin Play couldn't repay it all, and Tim was having disagreements with the private investors as to the direction the company should be taking. They wanted to do Nintendo DS games, while Tim felt that the future was in online gaming.

In the end, Tim Chaney and Virgin Play parted company, and Tim returned to the UK to pursue new business opportunities, ending his 17-year association with the Virgin name. Meanwhile, VIE owner Titus was having problems. Clashes with Interplay's senior management, legal issues and a spate of lacklustre releases were giving the French publisher major headaches. It changed its company name to Avalon Interactive in the summer of 2003, but it made no difference. Within two years the company shut down for good.

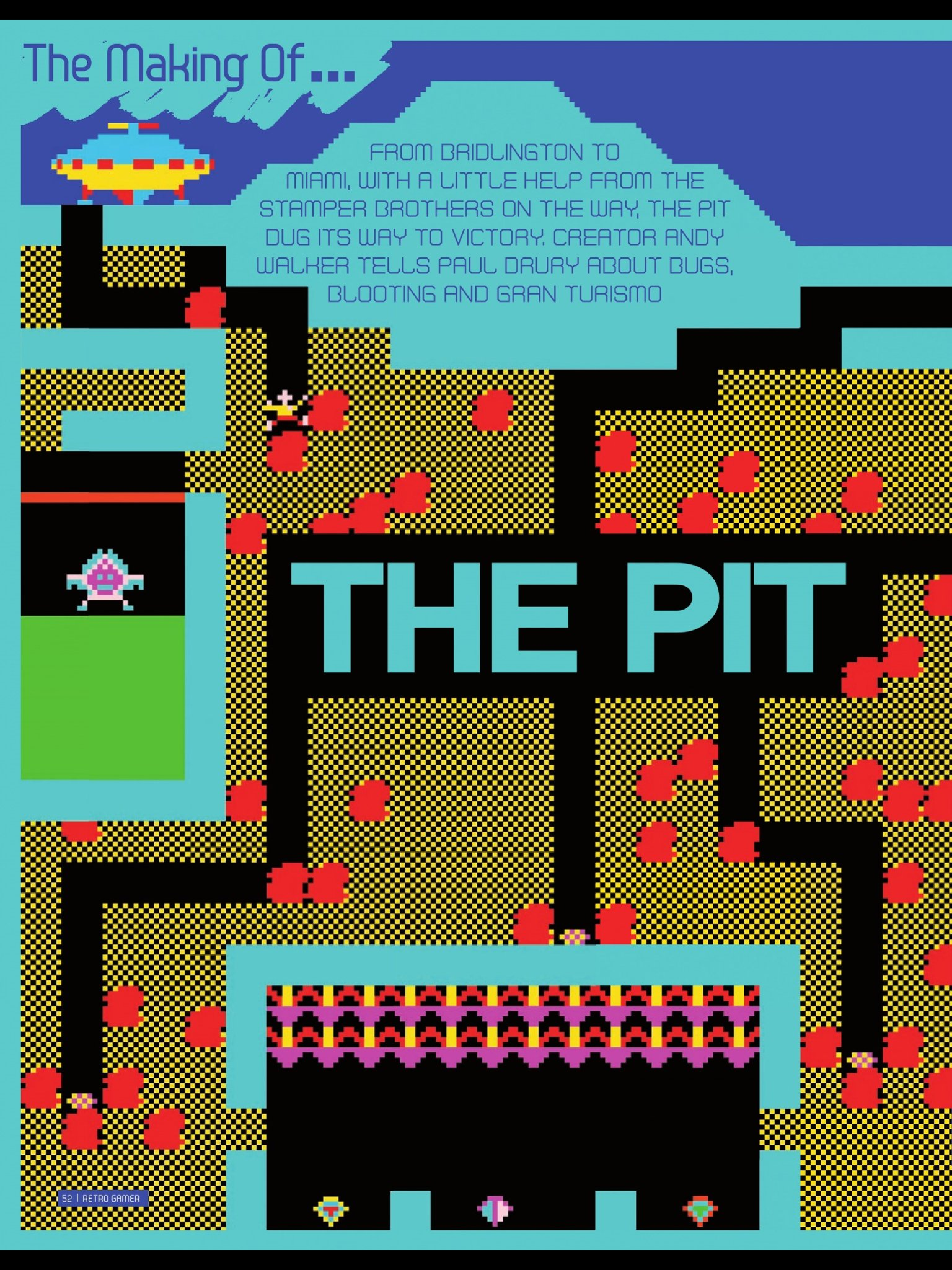
Virgin Play in Madrid was therefore the last standing vestige of the company that Nick Alexander created in 1983 and Tim Chaney turned into a huge, bold, brash, cocky behemoth of a videogames publisher in the Nineties. Virgin Interactive Entertainment may be no more, but its legacy remains to this day. 



» [PC] The collapse of Mirrorsoft gave VIE the chance to sign titles like *Beneath A Steel Sky*.

FROM BRIDLINGTON TO MIAMI, WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE STAMPER BROTHERS ON THE WAY, THE PIT DUG ITS WAY TO VICTORY. CREATOR ANDY WALKER TELLS PAUL DRURY ABOUT BUGS, BLOOTING AND GRAN TURISMO

THE PIT





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CENTURI
- » **DEVELOPERS:** ANDY WALKER AND TONY GIBSON
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **GENRE:** DIG-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR AN ORIGINAL MACHINE

PALM PIT

THOUGH *THE PIT* never got a home conversion, it almost became a handheld, as Andy explains. "Bandai wanted to make a handheld LCD version of it… Joel was pushing hard and the Japanese very nearly came on board. They were going to pay $1 per machine produced, which was nearly twice the going rate. Joel had done his work and they wouldn't start unless they were going to make 3 million of them. I was probably a week away from retiring when they turned up at one meeting and just said 'No, we don't want it. Doesn't matter about the price. Goodbye.' That was it. I was on the plane home…"

Retro Gamer: What was a little company based in a quaint English seaside town doing making an arcade game for Centuri in Miami?
Andy Walker: There was no reason why we couldn't. We were a bit arrogant. No, we were a bit naive. In a previous life a microprocessor had floated across my desk and I'd thought, I can do things with that, so I had quit my job and started building my own machines. It was just at the moment when you could build hardware and write software on it yourself.

» For more on Andy Walker's illustrious career, see **RG**41.

RG: So you didn't just write the game, you actually built the machine?
AW: We had these Tangerine computers. You had to solder them together yourself, but with them I knew I could make something as good as anyone else. Living by the seaside, I grew up among the arcades. It was pinball then and when videogames arrived they were a bit like wearing your hat backwards. Like, [adopts cocky accent] You think so, eh? That was the catalyst, seeing videogames come to Bridlington. I thought, I can do that. So I did.

RG: Didn't *The Pit* actually start out as a bug?
AW: An absolute error. We had this game *Andromeda*, a homage to *Defender*. The spaceship had a fin on the back and it didn't always rub itself out. It would paint the screen in pixels but then when it went through a second time it would tunnel through them. Ah, there's a game there!

RG: An epiphany! So was it plain sailing after that?
AW: God, no. Tony 'Gibbo' Gibson had come to join us from Barnstable and we were working in assembler, me and Tony, in a spare room in our house in Bridlington. It was rudimentary stuff. You'd write in assembler in a single pass and it would allocate where the routine was for, say, drawing the man. You'd print that off and pin it on the wall, so you could remember what the address was for the next day's work. There were no labels or two-pass assemblers in those days.

RG: Plus you were building the hardware too, right?
AW: The technology was horrendous. A Tangerine machine that loaded from cassette with some homemade add-ons. I was arrogant enough to think I could build an arcade machine from scratch, including making the circuit boards. Pretty silly looking back, but we did it. In fact, *The Pit* was game number two in a multi-game machine.

RG: A multi-game cabinet in 1981?
AW: I invented this machine where you could hot swap ROM boards. You could have three games running and add in a fourth game without having to turn it off. The machine would find it and add it to the menu. We took it to the preview show at the Cunard hotel, which later became Novotel, and that's where we met Joel Hochberg.

RG: Hang on, we've heard that name. Didn't he go on to set up Rare?
AW: Back then he was a mover and shaker in the videogames industry and he influenced the way everything happened for us. He took the hardware, the games, the lot, back to the States. Zilec Electronics of Burton-on-Trent shipped it over. That company was run by Norman Parker and they had these engineers called Chris and Tim Stamper. Tim had just joined as their artist, I think…

RG: That's the link with Rare! So what happened with *The Pit*?
AW: That whole multi-game machine was set up in the Fountain Blue hotel, Miami, and they got terrific site results. We sent them *Andromeda*, *The Pit* and *Hunter*, and *The Pit* was played more than anything else. That's what they wanted and Joel licensed it to Centuri, at $136 per machine, when the average was $40. He wanted a horrific royalty himself and first class travel everywhere, but I will never begrudge him a cent because he made me an awful lot of money.

» [Arcade] All I want for Christmas is a big red tank called Zonker.

RG: What about your customised Tangerine machines?
AW: They couldn't reproduce our hardware, but they wanted the game enough to rewrite it onto their hardware. They changed the view from landscape to portrait and added in the word Zonker for the tank. That was Centuric! [laughs]. Ours was bit-mapped, so you could shave off single slithers of rock, but theirs was character mapped. Apart from that, it was the same as our original, I think.

The version you saw in the United Kingdom was converted for the *Galaxian* board by Chris and Tim Stamper. Tim had a great deal to do with all the presentation. He had a terrific eye for what looked right. Chris is the archetypal techno-maniac. He is so clever. He's awesome.

RG: Wow, *The Pit* might qualify as The Stampers' first published work. Tell us more about the premise of the game.
AW: It's rape and pillage. It's not our planet and those are not our jewels but we'll have them anyway.

> **"The catalyst was seeing videogames come to Bridlington. I thought, I can do that"**

» [Arcade] Rocks could provide cover from the alien robots, but the Zonker never sleeps….



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER PIPELINE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1983

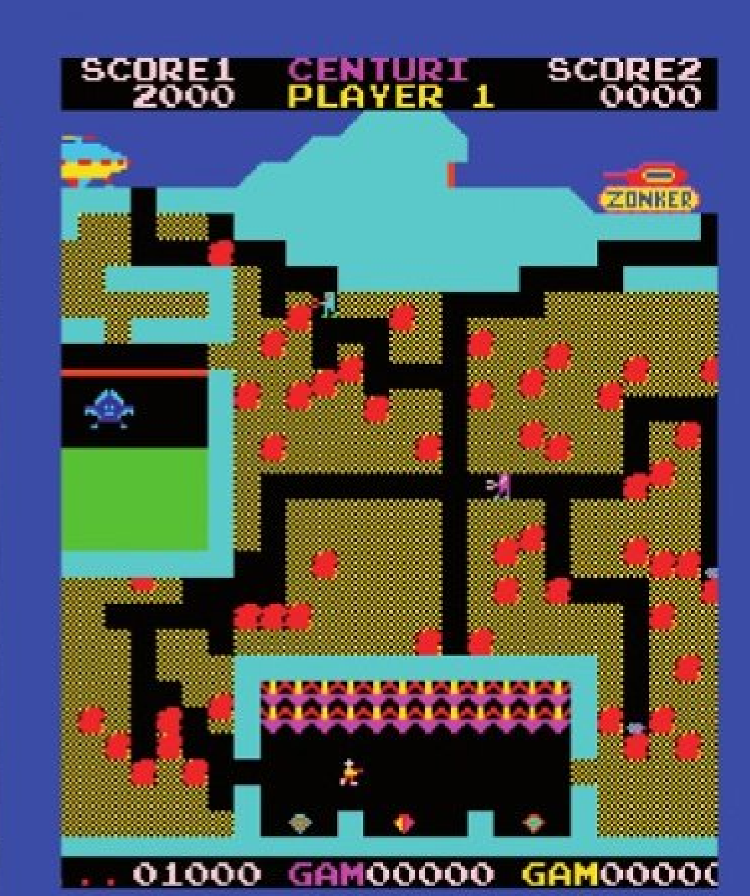
JAMMIN'
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1983

SEASIDE SPECIAL
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1984





» The Stamper Brothers' *Galaxian* board version of *The Pit* was also converted to run on the Omni arcade board



» [Arcade] Risk and reward in the gallery – do you try for all three gems or be happy with a single jewel and your life?

"The Zonker was the heartbeat of the game, what gave it that tempo"

RG: We love the way the little stickman tries to vainly hold up rocks that fall on him and how he tussles with the robots, like a cartoon Flash Gordon…
AW: I think that's giving it more grandeur than it deserves. It was more about what we could do with the minute amount of pixels we had. Tony christened the way he tunnelled as blooting [makes a convincing 'bloot' sound]. He bloots his way through! We invented the verb 'to bloot'.

RG: The game only has a single screen. Were there plans for others?
AW: Definitely. In later screens you were going to meet different aliens, culminating in meeting the Grand Dragon at the end. That was planned in detail. Gibbo had already named him. So when we were at the preview show demoing this machine, we all knew it was work in progress. We described it as such to some Japanese people who were extremely interested. I think they were from Namco or Atari. We described how you would find the Dragon and blow it up. Not 'you kill it,' but specifically, 'you blow it up'. The Japanese gave us an old-fashioned look then made expanding gestures, then 'boom'. The point being that when we said 'blow it up' they thought 'inflate'.

ROCKFORD'S DIGGING IT

THE PIT MAY never have spawned a sequel but its genes can be seen in *Boulder Dash*, whose creator, Peter Liepa, has named *The Pit* as a key influence on his underground masterpiece. "Nice adaptation, that," smiles Andy, "and it sold an awful lot. *Dig Dug*, *Mr Do*… they all came from *The Pit*, really. I'm content that we know that. If we'd gone for Atari, which was on the cards because we had this official seal three weeks ahead of them, it would've killed us. Joel Hochberg was right. Later deals, when we got involved with lots of lawyers and lots of money, all went wrong. I'm glad we didn't do it at that time or there wouldn't have been anything else."

RG: That sounds familiar…
AW: You may have seen that in *Dig Dug*. I'm convinced that their Dragon is related, though it may have lost something in translation. When I mentioned to Atari that their game was a bit close to ours, they said, 'Look in today's post and you'll see our solicitors are coming for you. We're going to sue your ass.' I thought, 'Mmm, they are quite big.'

RG: Were you shiing yourself?**
AW: Part of Joel Hochberg's good counsel was for God's sake, register your copyright. In the US, they'll give you a stamp and a date and ours was three weeks ahead of theirs. Immediately all the voices behind me said, go and sue their ass! But they had a fighting fund of $4 million and we had £1.50. Joel said, do you really want to spend your life fighting this or do you want to write the next game?

RG: You mention 'the next game'. Were you not tempted to do a sequel to *The Pit*?
AW: Done that, didn't want to do it again. It would have made good commercial sense but we wanted to do something else. With the money from *The Pit*, we bought these new machines, Intertec Superbrains, and started on the first version of *Pipeline* but it never came together as an arcade game.

RG: The idea did come together beautifully as *Super Pipeline* for the Commodore 64. When you moved onto home computers, did you not consider converting *The Pit*?
AW: I should've done a home version. If I'd been Ocean I would have. If I'd had a commercial brain cell I'd have done that.

RG: Our own Stuart Campbell had compared the game to *Gran Turismo*, describing how he reclines on his beanbag and attempts to put in the perfect lap.
AW: The perfect run! I know exactly what he means. That was where all the gameplay came from. Hours and hours of playing it and saying, 'Why can't we just move that up a bit, wouldn't it be a tw*t if we put a boulder just there…' and even though changing it was a complete nightmare, it was just done. And the Zonker was the heartbeat of the game, what gave it that tempo. It shot away the mountain and you didn't even need to look at it to know how much time you'd got left. Only two blocks to go but that's just enough time to do that final run across the plank over the pit and you're off.

RG: You certainly talk with fondness about this little lost gem.
AW: I can't emphasise enough the hours that went into testing it. Tony did an awful lot of hard work. There was nothing to stop you spending an evening trying out new routes. It might sound a bit sad, but we did. That's why it was a good game then and always will be. I'd be happy to play it today. Now, right here at R3play in Blackpool.

RG: Let's go and find a MAME cab, Andy…



» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#3 Tatung Einstein

For a computer that was financed by a Taiwanese company, named after a German-born intellectual, and allied to the Japanese MSX hardware standard, you may be surprised to learn that the Tatung Einstein was actually developed and manufactured in good old Blighty. The machine was designed at Tatung's Bradford-based research lab and assembled at the company's UK factories in Bridgnorth and Telford, while the system software was provided by Crystal Computers of Torquay.

Leading the development team was Bristol-born Roy Clarke. Speaking shortly after the machine's launch in 1984, he revealed the thinking behind the design: "The Einstein was conceived and developed for a specific sector of the market, embracing the enlightened home computer user, the educationalist, and the small business user. Every parameter was carefully considered in relation to the key objective of providing a complete package at minimum cost."

» The Einstein could support either a monitor or a portable television as its display.

JUST THE FACTS

More than 50,000 Einsteins were manufactured in its first six months of release, with 5,000 of these exported to Taiwan.

The Einstein was physically large, measuring 43x51x11cm. It would hurt if it fell on your foot.

The operating system was named Xtal DOS and was CP/M compatible. It was provided on disk and had to be booted up.

A version of the well-regarded BBC BASIC was available for the Einstein.

The system ROM was 8KB in size, expandable to 32KB.

Spectrum games could be played on the Einstein using the 'Speculator' hardware add-on from Syntaxsoft.

The original Einstein was succeeded by the Einstein 256, a more powerful computer that was similar to the MSX2 machines.

Ultimate's *Knight Lore* was due for release on the Einstein in November 1986. It never materialised.

To keep costs down, the Einstein was built using tried-and-trusted, off-the-shelf components. At its heart was the popular Zilog Z80A processor, the mainstay of many an 8-bit micro. Video was provided by the Texas Instruments TMS9129 display controller, which offered four different screen modes with a maximum resolution of 256×192, a 16-colour palette, and sprite-rendering capabilities, while audio was produced by the three-channel General Instrument AY-3-8910 sound generator. 64KB of RAM was included as standard.

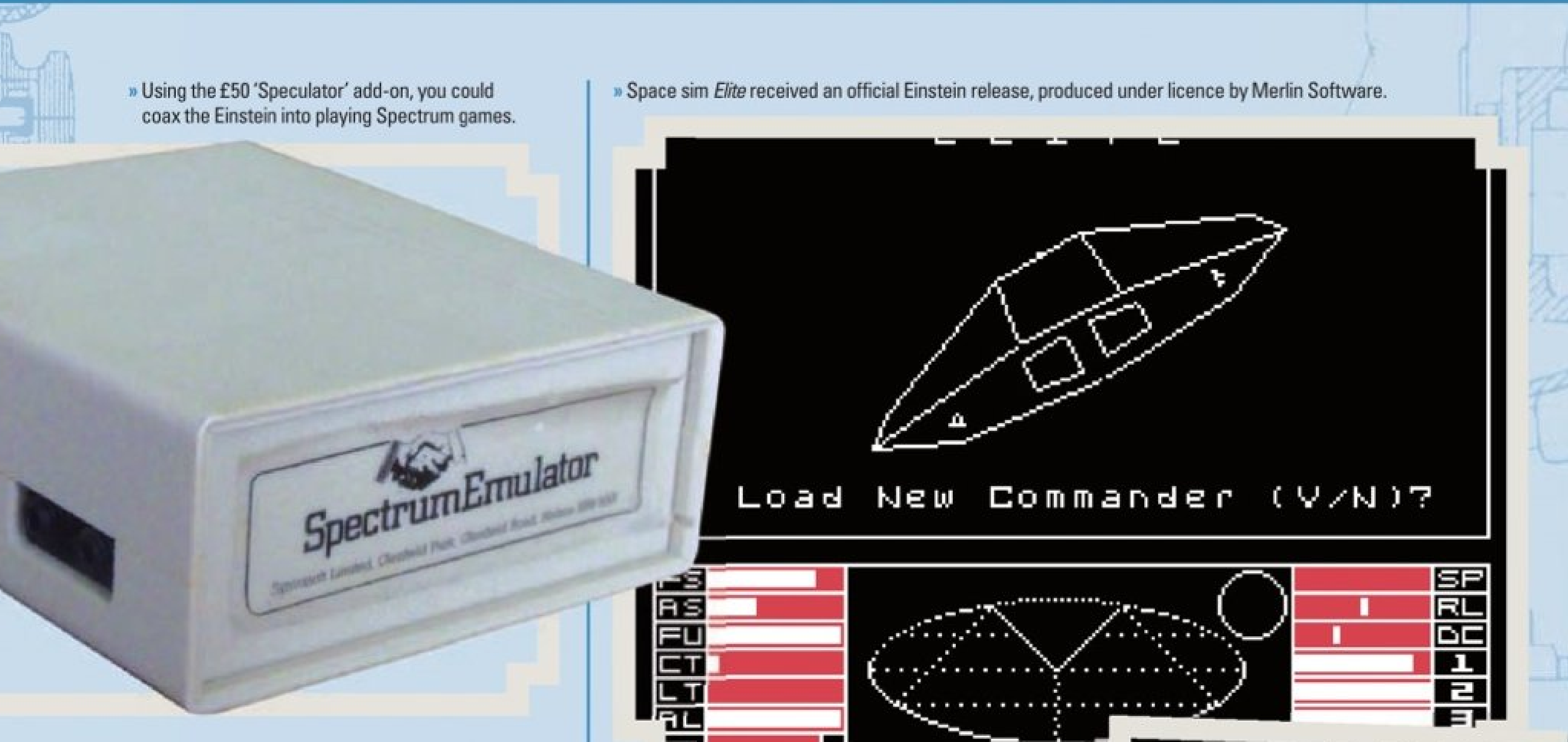
The spec closely matched the MSX hardware, but there were several differences that prevented it from conforming to the newly established standard. Microsoft BASIC was overlooked in favour of Xtal BASIC, a respected dialect that was previously available for Nascom computer kits. Roy said of Xtal BASIC: "It's got most of the common core of Microsoft BASIC and a lot of extra features, which are good for hackers and enthusiasts. We've got a language that I believe is probably the most powerful BASIC around. It's certainly easier to drive than BBC BASIC."

The key difference, however, was the absence of a tape interface. In an ambitious and unusual move, the Einstein came with a built-in 3-inch disk drive. "Tape is a pain," said Roy at the time. "One of our team had a BBC, another had a



» Tatung issued the quarterly *Einstein User* magazine. It was sent out to members of the Einstein Users' Club.

The Tatung Einstein was one of the many 8-bit also-rans that never quite made it against the big boys. Martyn Carroll finds out if it deserved to do better



» Using the £50 'Speculator' add-on, you could coax the Einstein into playing Spectrum games.

» Space sim *Elite* received an official Einstein release, produced under licence by Merlin Software.



NewBrain, and I had an Apple and a Sharp, so we've all suffered under tape-based systems and we all hate them. We built in a 3-inch drive and that obviated the need for tape." There was also an empty bay to install a second drive, and a further two external drives could be added, so the question with the Einstein wasn't, 'Would Sir like a disk drive with that?' but rather, 'How many drives does Sir require?' According to Roy, 3-inch drives were chosen over the 3.5-inch format because it was cheaper and easier to source the volumes required from the hardware manufacturers.

There may have been no tape interface or cartridge slot, but the machine featured an impressive range of external connectors, including twin joystick ports, an RS-232 serial port, a parallel printer port, a user-programmable port, and a system bus known as the 'Pipe' – a nod to the BBC Micro's 'Tube'. It also looked the part, with a lovely full travel keyboard and a large, beige case on which you could place a monitor or portable TV, as both were supported.

The Einstein went on sale in June 1984 with a retail price of £499, which was considerably more expensive than your average 8-bit. If you had particularly deep pockets, you could add the second internal drive for £149, while an external drive would set you back a further £189. An 80-column display card could also be added for £49, and a dot-matrix printer was yours for £229. Actual sales figures are unknown, but it's safe to say that the Einstein didn't sell in great numbers. Indeed, it was heavily discounted and, by 1986, you could pick up the core computer for less than £100.

Einstein owners did at least have access to a reasonably large software library. Besides the expected utilities and business programs, there was a surprising number of well-known games ported from the MSX and Spectrum. They included Jon Ritman's *Batman* (Ocean), *Chuckie Egg* (A'n'F), *Starquake* (Bubble Bus), *Highway Encounter* (Vortex), *Druid* and *Elite* (Firebird), and *Manic Miner* and *Dragon's Lair* (Software Projects). Infocom also released many of its interactive fiction titles for the machine, including *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and the original *Zork* trilogy. Best of the lot, though, was Konami's excellent value compilation disk, which included *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *King's Valley*, *Time Pilot* and *Comic Bakery*, all of which were ports of the MSX cartridge versions.

In retrospect, however, the Einstein is perhaps more famous for the games developed on it rather than for it. Thanks to its decent keyboard, ample memory, built-in disk drive and overall reliability, it proved to be the perfect programming system. A number of the UK's biggest software houses – notably Imagine, Ocean and Elite – used Einsteins to develop games for the Spectrum, CPC, C64 and other platforms. Code would be created and assembled on the Einstein, then transferred directly to the target machine, where it could be tested and debugged if necessary. In later years, Atari STs and subsequently PCs would emerge as the development systems of choice, leaving the Tatung Einstein to claim its place as a fascinating footnote in the history of computing.

PERFECT THREE



KING'S VALLEY

The pick of Konami's four-game disk compilation, and probably the best game available for the Einstein. This classy platformer sees you raiding pyramids while avoiding various nasties. Brilliant fun.



CHUCKIE EGG

Hen House Harry's first adventure was available for loads of rival machines, but this version easily holds its own. Nice and colourful, and with the fast and fluid gameplay intact, it's an essential game.



LAZY JONES

David Whittaker's multi-game mash-up represents real value for money, as a few of the arcade-inspired segments are actually better than some standalone Einstein releases. A quirky classic.

Thanks to Mario Castro for providing information and images. Visit his Tatung Einstein Reborn website at **www.tatungeinstein.co.uk**.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO…

#05 Flashback

Instant Expert

Flashback was first released on the Amiga in 1992. It was spread across four disks.

Flashback is the brainchild of Paul Cuisset. In addition to coming up with the game's concept, he also wrote, directed, designed and helped program the game.

Flashback currently holds the Guinness World Record for being the bestselling French game of all time.

Due to its popularity, *Flashback* received a sequel that was released in 1996. *Fade To Black* was only available on the PC and PSone, and was vastly different to its predecessor.

Flashback was also due for release on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Developed by Adeline Software, the port featured a brand new plot and many new locations. A leaked beta ROM is available online.

The PC DOS version has an extended cut-scene sequence that wasn't in other versions of the game.

US Gold released *Flashback* in Europe and North America. In Japan, publishing duties fell to Sunsoft.

US versions of the Mega Drive, Mega-CD and Super Nintendo games came with a Marvel comic that explained much of Conrad's back story.

Utilising the same motion-capture techniques that made Jordan Mechner's Prince Of Persia such a success, Flashback introduced the world to Conrad B Heart and another delicious slice of French gaming. Darran Jones takes the Mega Drive outing for a spin…



Many people think that *Flashback* is the sequel to *Another World*. It isn't, but we can certainly see why these comparisons are made. Both games use cut-scenes to advance their stories, both take place on strange alien worlds, they were both published by Delphine, and both benefit from truly glorious rotoscoped animation.

The similarities end there, though, and while *Flashback* certainly feels familiar if you've ever played Eric Chahi's game, it's a totally different and far more ambitious beast.

Indeed, what impresses you about *Flashback* is the sheer amount of variety and scale that it offers you. One minute you're platforming through a gorgeous-looking jungle, the next you're negotiating the new-age subways of Titan, taking part in a game show akin to *The Running Man* and exploring an alien planet. It's a huge, impressive monster of a game that was so grand in scope that at one stage it was pitched as a "CD-ROM game on a cartridge".

First released on the Amiga in 1992, it immediately won rave reviews due to its cinematic cut-scenes, breathtaking animation and varied gameplay. It was quickly ported to all manner of computers and home consoles, ranging from Sega's Mega Drive to the FM Towns and Atari's Jaguar, and it remains highly regarded by anyone who's been fortunate enough to play it.

Flashback tells the story of Conrad B Heart, an agent who has to recover his lost memory when he discovers that aliens are living in his world and disguising themselves as government officials, plotting to destroy Earth. After being captured in *Flashback*'s epic opening and subsequently escaping, Conrad must recover his precious memories – don't worry; he kept them conveniently safe – and save the world.

It's showtime!

Yes, it takes elements from numerous movies of the time – most notably the aforementioned *The Running Man* and the excellent *They Live* – but Conrad's tale still feels refreshingly different, effortlessly building on the story structure that Jordan Mechner carefully created for his *Prince Of Persia*. It also feels suitably epic, with most levels beginning with larger-than-life cut-scenes that forward Conrad's plight and keep the player absolutely enthralled with what's happening on screen. Again, it's not a new mechanic for videogames and had been utilised to similar great effect in 1991's *Another World*, and yet somehow

Pixel Perfect

Get a load of Flashback's wonderful rotoscoped animation


» Conrad run and jump
» Master Brain
» Conrad dropping down
» Jet pack policeman
» Drone
» Morph
» Policeman
» Ian
» Mine
» Droid
» Shifting Exterminator
» Old man
» Scientist
» Exterminator
» Conrad jump
» Jungle dweller
» Regenerator chair
» Conrad roll
» Taxi
» Conrad dead



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO… #05 Flashback

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought…



"It's challenging, entertaining, thoroughly addictive, and it looks better than any random sequence from Cindy Crawford's workout video."

- **AMIGA POWER** ISSUE 25

Twin Galaxies High Scores

Interestingly, there are no current high scores for *Flashback* on Twin Galaxies. Categories exist for both time trials (NTSC and PAL versions) and overall high scores, so let's see if a reader can set a new record for one of them.

Flashback just felt more filmic, possibly due to it riffing so heavily on those previously mentioned movies.

Even with its cinematic cut-scenes, it's *Flashback*'s riveting gameplay and sheer variety that last longest in the memory and will keep you playing through to its impressive end. Waking up in one of Titan's jungles, the first stage of *Flashback* is little more than an excuse to test your abilities and get used to Conrad's amazing athleticism. Utilising the same rotoscoping techniques that worked so well in *Prince Of Persia* – clearly a major inspiration given the number of similarities – and *Another World*, Conrad B Heart is an absolute joy to watch in motion, effortlessly climbing and leaping around the large game world. There are certainly moments that feel occasionally clunky – drawing your gun, for example, or making certain jumps – but even their limitations rarely ruin Conrad's breathtaking animation.

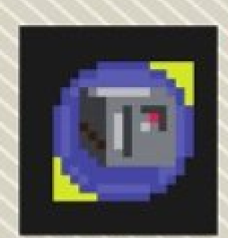
After negotiating the tricky platform-heavy jungle the gameplay becomes a little more sedate, with Conrad travelling to New Washington and having to earn a work permit – six years before Ryo started working on the docks in *Shenmue* – in order to earn entry to the charmingly named *Death Tower*, a *Running Man*-styled show – there's that comparison again – that allows the survivor to win a free pass to Earth. Here the gameplay becomes more action-oriented, with Conrad having to climb several levels that are swarming with enemies. Upon reaching Earth the exploration opens up yet again, until Conrad eventually finds himself transported to the alien planet of the Morphs. Several moments of extreme heroism later and the game ends with not only a nod to Ridley Scott's *Alien*, but also the prospect that all your hard work has been for nothing. Fortunately, a sequel eventually appeared in the form of *Fade To Black*.

It's frustratingly hard in places, with the controls not always feeling like they're keeping up with Conrad, but the end result is a timeless platform adventure that, like the best of wines, just keeps getting better with age.

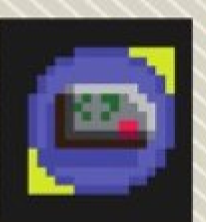
» [Mega Drive] Whether dystopian sci-fi cities or lush jungles, *Flashback* manages to look spectacular.

The Devices

Conrad finds devices throughout his adventure that offer new abilities to turn against his pursuers



» Holocube
This essential device is picked up at the beginning of your adventure and explains where you need to go to properly continue your quest.

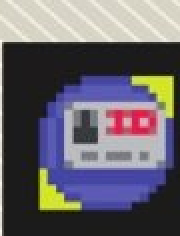


» Credits
You won't get far on Titan without money. Credits can be earned by getting a job permit or by simply picking them up from the ground.

» Diary
Belonging to Philip Howard Clark, this diary explains how the aliens were planning to take over and what Conrad must do to stop them.

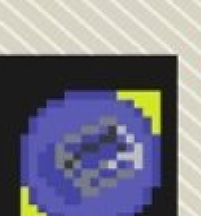
» Force Field
Conrad's friend Ian gives this to him on Level 2. It's a relatively useful device that can shield Conrad for a limited amount of time.

» Gun
Conrad's gun is never far from his side, which is handy, as he has to use it a lot. A dependable weapon that makes short work of anything.





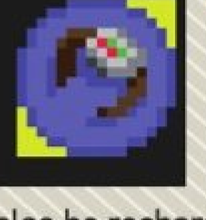
» ID Card
Conrad is given this by the stranger he helps on the first stage. It allows him to get about in the city of New Washington.



» Key
There are lots of blocked-off areas on the world of Titan. These small devices will ensure that Conrad is able to get through all of them.

» Map
New Washington is a massive area with lots of different locations. This handy map highlights key areas, making navigation much easier.





» Shield
There are plenty out to get Conrad, so this shield, which can absorb four hits, is very useful. It can also be recharged at specific waypoints.



» Work Permit
Conrad needs to earn money to get fake papers, so he uses this work permit to get a variety of different jobs and therefore some cash.



» Tele Receiver
An amazingly handy device that Conrad can use for teleportation purposes. Simply select it then throw it to the floor.

» Tele Control
Once you've thrown your Tele Receiver to the floor, you can use this device to instantly transport to it. Very useful for navigating tricky areas.

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy a few of Flashback's many highlights

The chase

Flashback's opening credits sequence where Conrad flees from his antagonists still manages to impress after all these years. It sets up the action beautifully and gives you a clear indication of the cinematic excellence that is to come as the game progresses.





Meeting Conrad

Sure, the techniques used to animate Conrad had been seen before, but watching the amnesiac agent as he leaps, runs and somersaults around the screen is still a joy. He also dresses far cooler than Mechner's Prince.



The pick-up

It sounds a trite thing, but picking up objects in *Flashback* is cool. Admittedly, seeing the same animation continuously used does grate a little, but it's still an impressive way of drawing you in to the on-screen action.



Frantic escape

There's a wonderful moment in one of *Flashback*'s early levels where Conrad has to frantically outrun a detonation – there's actually another in the game's finale, but this one sticks in the memory. Run, Conrad, run.



It's time to start running

Conrad's frantic dash through *Death Tower* is a massive change of pace from the rest of the game, with the player constantly kept on his toes by a seemingly never-ending line of enemies to escape.



Story time

This is clever. Upon reaching Ian, you're given your memories back in a *Total Recall*-style chair. You're then treated to an elaborate sequence that sets up the cinematic chase that you witnessed at *Flashback*'s beginning. Very new wave.



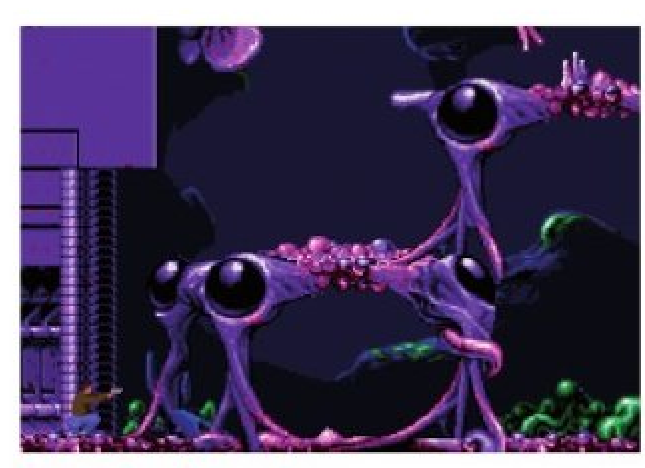
Breaking glass

It seems incredibly minor here, but there was a moment on Level 4 where we just couldn't progress any further. Frustrated, we took out Conrad's gun and shot a wall, only for it to disintegrate in a shattering of glass. Genius.



Job centre

While plenty of early videogames focused on a profession as their gameplay's main focus, not many of them saw you doing jobs within the framework of the actual game. Are there any earlier than *Flashback*? Let us know.



Meet the Morphs

If you thought Conrad's animation was impressive, wait until you see the Morphs. Devoid of their human skins, these rubbery aliens slide around the screen with a sickening realism that still looks absolutely fantastic.



Alien HQ

After traversing some dour locations, the aliens' home planet is a thing of beauty, capturing the stylish visuals of the opening jungle. It's all rather pink, but the strange plants and creatures that live in it make it feel like a real ecosystem.



Brain freeze

This is an exhilarating battle that has Conrad desperately trying to shut down the evil cerebrum, while fending off an infinite supply of Morphs. It's rather frustrating, but it still lodges itself within your memory.

Due to its massive success, Flashback spawned two sequels, only one of which received a commercial release

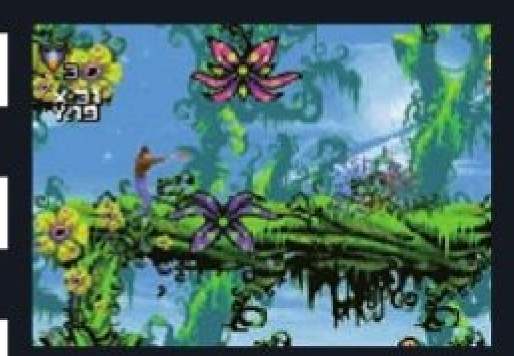


Fade To Black

By the time Paul Cuisset released *Flashback*'s sequel, the gaming world had gone 3D crazy. Playing like a cross between *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid*, *Fade To Black* was a third-person adventure that utilised the now-popular over-the-shoulder viewpoint.

The story sees Conrad again captured and caught up in another elaborate plot for world domination. While it's extremely rough around the edges visually, *Fade To Black* has a far stronger plot.

The tricky control system and slow pace of Conrad make this a world away from the original game and almost kills it in places, but it remains a slick adventure that does capture the essence of *Flashback*.



Flashback Legends

Conrad was also set to appear in an adventure for the GBA, due in 2004. Unlike *Fade To Black*, the action once again reverted to the side-on gameplay of old and shared many elements with the original game. Locations were very similar and included New Delphi City, the Morph planet and a jungle, while familiar enemies were also present. The original cut-scenes had been replaced with a new comic strip look, and *Flashback Legends* introduced new characters as well.

Sadly, as Delphine Software ran into financial difficulties, the game was eventually cancelled, seemingly doomed to disappear forever… until a leaked beta ROM appeared on the internet in 2008. Despite lots of bugs and technical issues, the ROM gave a good indication of how the final game may have turned out, and it looks truly gorgeous on its later stages. What a shame, then, that Conrad's adventures had to end in such a downbeat way.



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO…

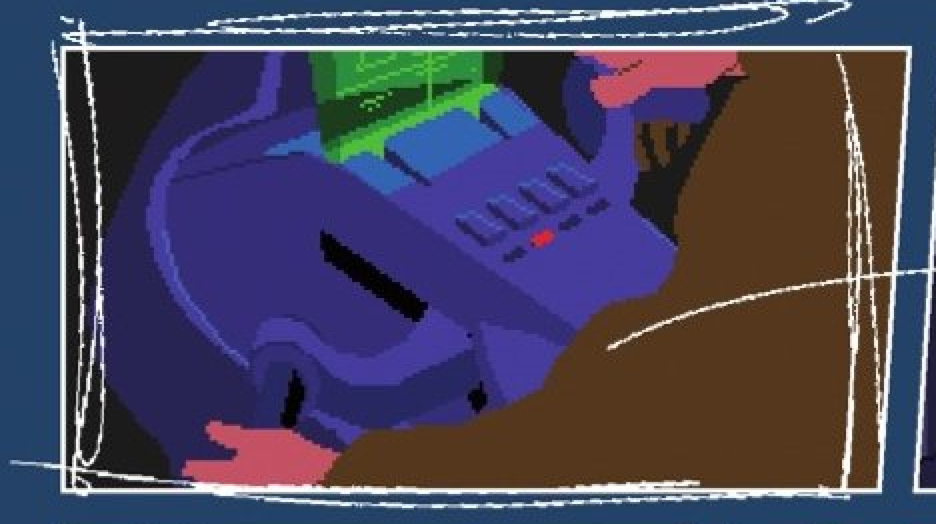
#05 Flashback

Flashback – The Movie

One of the best things about *Flashback* is its gripping and enjoyable storyline. Despite the limitations of the home systems that it appeared on, Paul Cuisset uses a number of clever cinematic techniques – including, appropriately, a flashback scene – in order to immerse the player in Conrad's dangerous world. While it borrows heavily from many classic sci-fi films, *Flashback*'s tale is a surprisingly adult one and is an interesting cautionary tale. Knowing that not everyone is going to have the time to experience its greatness, we've put together these handy little storyboards, so you can review Conrad's story at your own pace. Enjoy!

Part One

Our introduction to Conrad is watching his thudding feet as he desperately tries to escape two trenchcoat-wearing enemies. Despite quickly hopping on a nearby jetbike, his antagonists follow him in a large spacecraft. Several salvos later and Conrad's bike is hit and he crash lands in the jungles of Titan. After several moments of searching, he's eventually left for dead.



Part Two

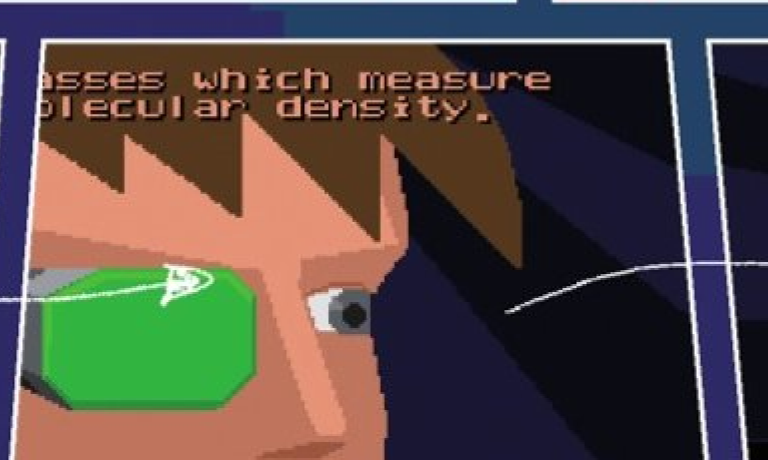
Upon waking up, Conrad's first task is to retrieve the holocube that holds his memories. The jungle is filled with danger, but he discovers a wounded stranger who begs for help. After Conrad finds the stranger's teleporter, the grateful person teleports away but leaves behind an ID card. Conrad discovers the entrance to New Washington and, after paying for an anti-G belt, reaches his destination.



Part Three

In New Washington, Conrad seeks out his friend Ian, who restores his memory. The player soon discovers that Conrad has created a device that enables him to view the molecular structure of humans. He soon discovers that aliens are among the population and, fearing for his life, transfers his thoughts to the holocube before his memory is wiped.





Part Four

Conrad quickly learns that he'll never earn the money to buy a ticket to Earth, so his best bet is taking part in the popular game show, *Death Tower*. After doing some jobs, Conrad earns enough money to pay a forger for papers so that he can enter *Death Tower*. He eventually wins the contest and immediately heads to Earth and seeks out the aliens' hideout.





Part Five

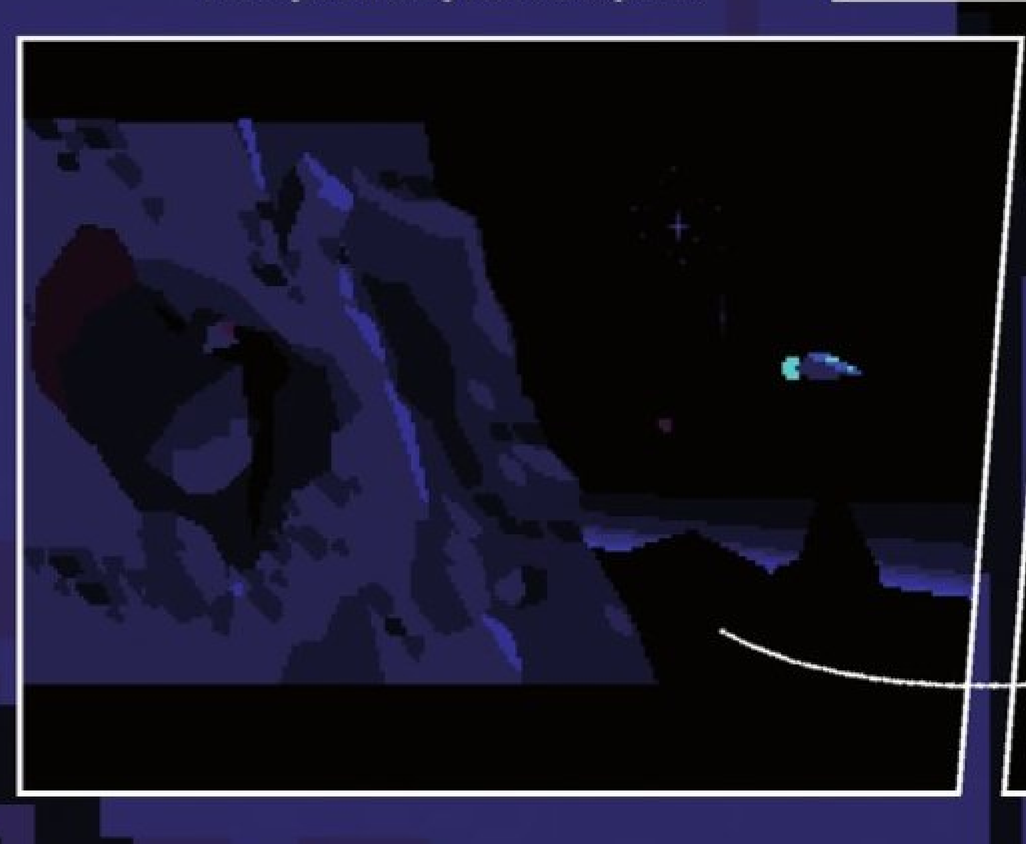
When he reaches the hideout, he finds three aliens deep in discussion. Plans to take over the planet are moving faster than Conrad had anticipated, and he discovers that they are planning on assaulting Earth in their millions. Before he can do anything, the grate he was hiding behind gives way, revealing his location. Conrad is taken for interrogation. Things don't look good…

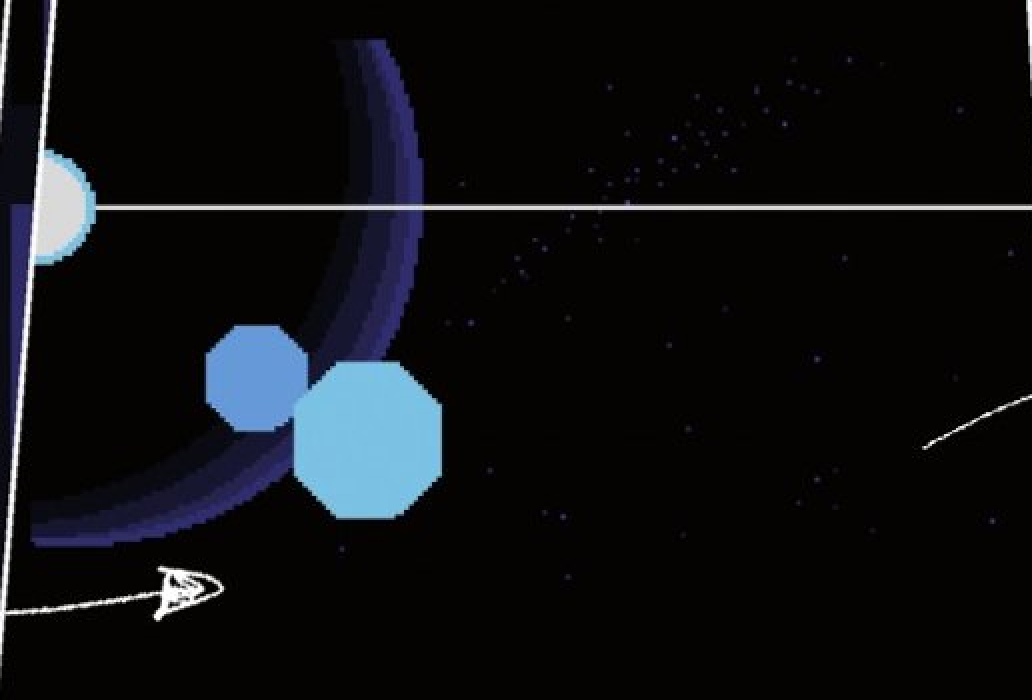




Part Six

Conrad escapes from prison and finds a teleporter that takes him to the aliens' planet. Once there, he discovers a human prisoner but is unable to help before aliens murder him. Conrad is given an atomic charger and picks up the prisoner's diary, which tells him how to blow up the planet. After placing the charge, Conrad flees into space but soon discovers that he's not in any known galaxy. He is last seen entering suspended animation after putting a message on his screen that implies that it may be some time before he is rescued.









REPLAY
ANTI G SYSTEM
OK STANDARD
Then I save the contents of my memory and send it to Ian
"I HAVE ERASED HIS MEMORY."
Thanks to our knowledge, the humans are now capable
A SPY... Throw the wretch
It's impossible for me to calculate my return trajectory.
The galaxy I am in today doesn't appear on any of our navigation charts.
I'll probably drift in space for a very long time...

IMPORT ONLY

GAME ORIGIN

- » COUNTRY: JAPAN
- » POPULATION: 127,433,494
- » CAPITAL: TOKYO
- » NATIONAL LANGUAGE: JAPANESE
- » CURRENCY: YEN
- » TIME ZONE: GMT +9

» CO-ORDINATES: 35°41' N 139°46' E

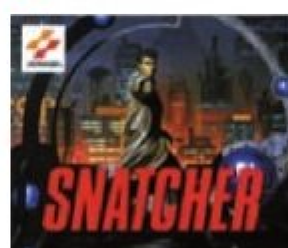
INFO



- » **PUBLISHER:** YUJI HORII (LATER ENIX)
- » **DEVELOPER:** YUJI HORII (PORT CHUNSOFT)
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** FAMICOM
- » **ALSO ON:** PC-6001/MKII, PC-8801, FM7/8, X1, MSX, MOBILE PHONE
- » **GENRE:** VISUAL NOVEL
- » **RELEASED:** 29/11/1985 (FC)
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW YEN

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



SNATCHER
GET IT FOR: **SEGA CD**
From the menu interface and manually dialling a phone to make calls, through to clues hidden behind paintings and a big plot twist at the end, *Snatcher*'s evolution from *Portopia* is abundantly obvious. Its cyberpunk atmosphere is tense compared to *Portopia*'s laidback style.

▼ Modern



9 HOURS, 9 PERSONS, 9 DOORS
GET IT FOR: **NINTENDO DS**
The latest visual novel from Chunsoft (the original company which converted *Portopia* to the Famicom), this is being localised by Aksys Games for Western release in November 2010. All accounts from early adopters say it's excellent.

PORTOPIA RENZOKU SATSUJIN JIKEN

» When discussing the most important videogame releases, the same titles are always mentioned. But when one of the most influential games is a Japan-only release, you've probably not heard of it. John Szczepaniak brings you this report from the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum archives

Games such as *Super Mario Bros*, *Tetris*, and *Street Fighter* defined their respective genres (or in the latter's case, reinvented what came before). In Japan, *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* defined the visual novel genre; it was the first from which all subsequent titles followed. The classification has several variations: sound novel, graphic adventure, digital comic, dating sim (a specific sub-genre), among others. Today it's hugely popular in Japan while remaining distinct from Western adventures, and is available on both consoles and handhelds, sometimes integrated into other genres.

That first blossoming, though, was *Portopia* in 1983, on the primitive PC-6001 computer variants. Not only was *Portopia* the first example of the genre in Japan, it has an important pedigree, since the man behind it was *Dragon Quest* creator Yuji Horii. In 1981 he was 27 and bought his first computer, which he learned to program on by modifying other people's games. As he explained, "During that time, I read an article in a PC magazine



» [Famicom] In the underground maze you will find messages from Yuji Horii, mostly pertaining to Wizardry.

about a US computer game genre called 'adventure games', which allowed players to read stories on their PCs. We still didn't have them in Japan, and I took it upon myself to make one. That was how *Portopia* came about. It was a program in which the story would develop through entering a command and receiving an answer to it."

Portopia was a success and received several ports to other computers. Its most popular re-release was the Famicom port in 1985, and in 2003 it was voted Japan's 32nd favourite Famicom game by *Famitsu* readers, out of the available 1252* games. The Famicom version came about when Kouichi Nakamura, CEO of Chunsoft at age 19, was considering what to make after coming second in the Enix-sponsored Game Hobby Program Contest, with his entry *Door Door*.

"Back then most Famicom games were action-oriented," said Nakamura during the Level-X anniversary exhibition. "I suggested we make an adventure game, aiming it at older people. However, at that time the memory of the Famicom was so small you could only store a few images, which were crucial to adventure



» [Famicom] This guy by the harbour has a package for Toshi, containing illegal narcotics.



» [Famicom] A successful businessman is found dead at home. Was it suicide or murder?



» [Famicom] The game's interface should be recognisable to adventure game veterans.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

FUMIE
» Kouzou's private secretary with a watertight alibi for the night of the murder.



KOMIYA
» A security guard with a drinking problem who you need to beat answers out of.



TOSHI
» This drug dealing street punk is Kouzou's nephew and heir. In love with Yukiko.



HIRATA
» Disappeared the day of the murder. A struggling greengrocer in debt.



YUKIKO
» Second-year high school student and only daughter of Hirata. She hates Toshi.



OKOI
» A famous stripper who dances at the Shingeki Silver Club. Reveals big secrets!



KAWAMURA
» Habitual conman – not the murderer, but commits suicide.



> "Kojima regards it as influential, and the similarities between Portopia and Snatcher are unmistakable"

games. Then I remembered *Portopia* for the PC-6001. That was a great adventure despite only having about 20 screens. We thought this could work on the Famicom, and it became [mine and Yuji Horii's] first collaboration."

Nakamura had met Horii during Enix's contest, since Horii had been both entrant and *Shonen Jump* reporter, interviewing the young Nakamura. This Famicom port also resulted in further collaboration for Horii's *Dragon Quest* (released 1986), where Nakamura was lead programmer. His company Chunsoft later went on to become one of Japan's most popular visual novel developers, creating hits such as *428: Shibuya*.

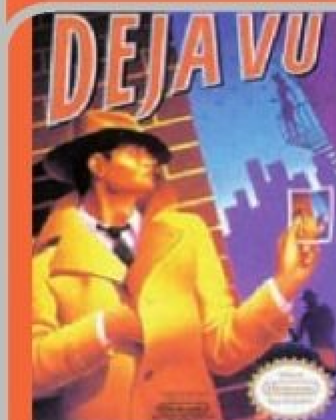
Reaching the West

With *Portopia*'s story revolving around a murder investigation and featuring interrogation beatings, drug dealing, two cases of suicide plus a strip joint, it was never going to see a Western release. Which would have left it as a forgotten footnote in the history of Japanese games, were it not for fan-translation group DvD Translations in 2006. The complexity of the ROM hacking alone warrants an article, but they succeeded in creating a patch. This now allows us to see why so many in Japan fell in love with and were influenced by *Portopia*. Hideo Kojima regards it as one of the three most influential games he's ever played, and the similarities between *Portopia* and *Snatcher* are unmistakable.

For a genre fledgling it's surprisingly sophisticated. The Famicom port replaced the text parser of the PC original with menu selections, plus the option to hit things/people with a hammer or peer closely with a magnifying glass. An exclusive *Wizardry*-influenced maze was also added. Unfortunately there isn't a save option, but anyone playing the fan translation should be able to quicksave.

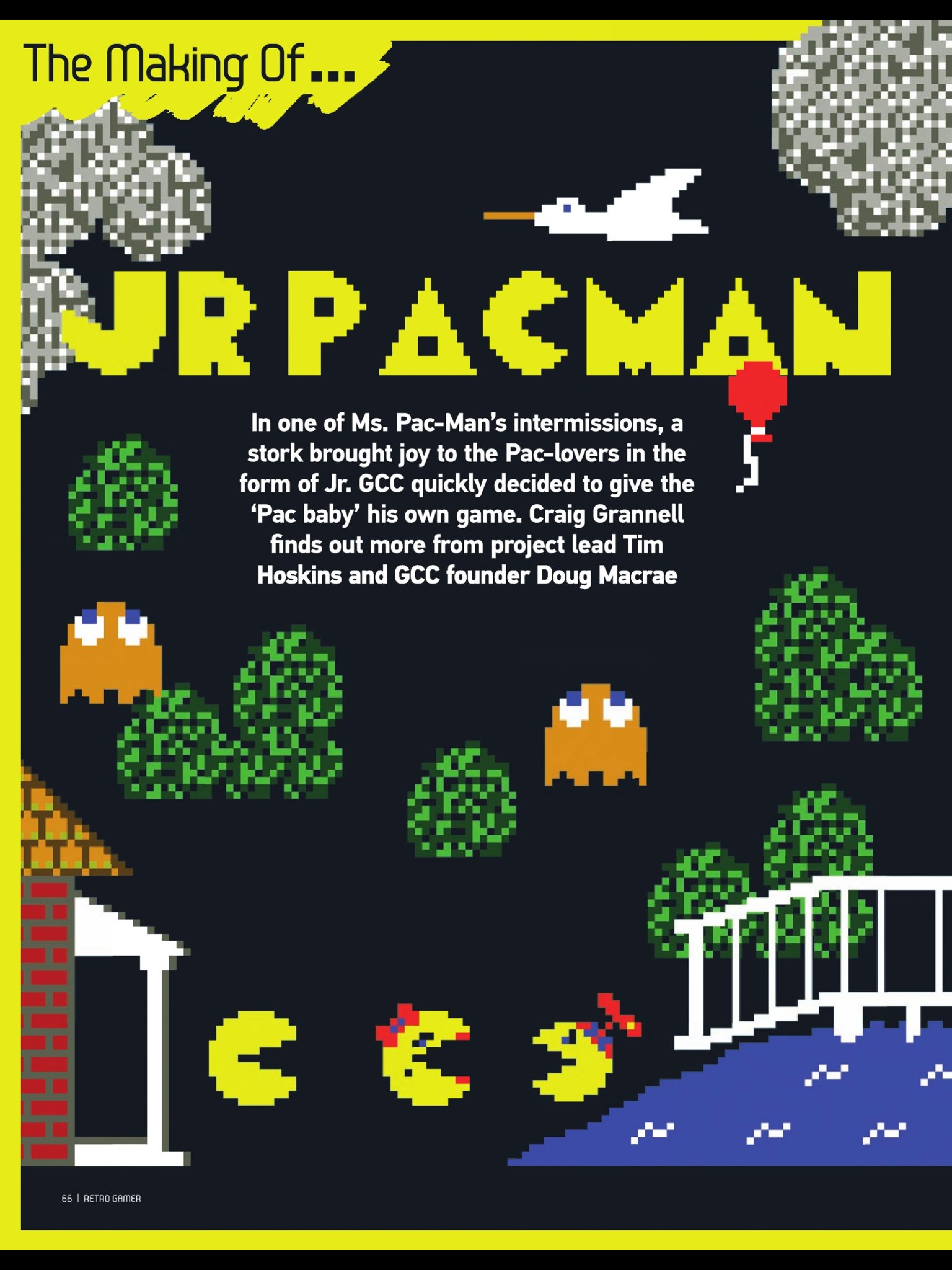
Over the course of the murder investigation you need to travel between several areas and the police station, call in suspects for interrogation, make phone calls, pick up parcels of drugs, and slowly unravel a mystery involving fraud, bankruptcy and suicide. Before the end there will be several red herrings designed to throw you off the scent, and if you finger the wrong culprit the Chief will chew you out and demand you reopen the case. Be prepared for a shock at the end!

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



DÉJÀ VU – NES (1990)
» A 1940s-style detective game originally for the Mac but ported to the NES, this is a reasonably close equivalent to a Western-developed Portopia. It's also possible for the main character to commit suicide by shooting himself, which miraculously got past the Nintendo censors. If you want a decent adventure on the Famicom/NES, but haven't got the language skills for a Japanese title or don't want to emulate a fan translation, this is your best option.

* Source: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography



JR PACMAN

In one of Ms. Pac-Man's intermissions, a stork brought joy to the Pac-lovers in the form of Jr. GCC quickly decided to give the 'Pac baby' his own game. Craig Grannell finds out more from project lead Tim Hoskins and GCC founder Doug Macrae



» [Arcade] Unlike earlier *Pac-Man* games, *Jr. Pac-Man* doesn't show the entire maze; instead, it scrolls horizontally.





» Tim Hoskins.

One minute, Pac-Man's footloose and fancy-free, ambling around mazes, popping pills, listening to repetitive music and occasionally duffing up ghosts. But thanks to GCC, he was tamed by the feminine wiles of Ms. Pac-Man. Not long after, a stork dumped a baby yellow disc in front of the now Pac-Family-Man. And like father, like son, Jr. Pac-Man soon got up to his own pill-munching, ghost-fighting antics.

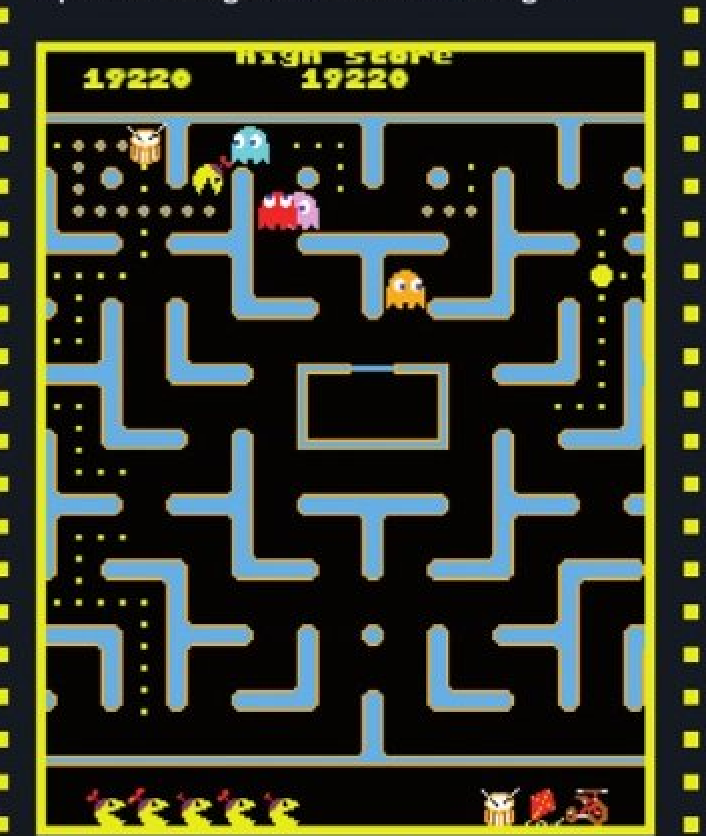
Tim Hoskins worked at GCC at the time and, as *Jr. Pac-Man*'s project lead, is well placed to provide insight into its development: "GCC founder Doug Macrae came up with the idea, but in his notes the game was called 'Pac-Baby'. It's safe to say that, with the success of *Super Missile Attack* and the excitement around the shipping of *Ms. Pac-Man*, the question at the time was 'what can be done next?'." Doug's recollection supports Tim's, and he expands on the game's genesis: "In *Ms. Pac-Man*, we'd created three intermissions: she and Pac-Man meet, they chase, and then 'Junior' arrives. We became excited about creating the Pac family and so shortly after the introduction of Ms. Pac-Man, we began work on *Jr. Pac-Man*. It was the obvious sequel, and since *Pac-Man* and *Ms. Pac-Man* were huge successes, we wanted to keep the series going."

But GCC was limited in its ambitions. Its arcade games could be sold as new cabinets, but also had to be possible to implement as hardware kits. Therefore, radical format changes were out; instead, Doug's ideas were based on what was possible by augmenting the original *Pac-Man* hardware. "Doug sketched out a scenario with 'baby stuff' that included bouncing toys instead of bonus fruit, and he'd come up with the idea of making the maze scroll horizontally, which lent itself to being a cool hack that worked with the kit," says Tim, adding that "great hardware engineer" Tom Westberg prototyped the hardware extensions needed to implement that feature.

As with *Ms. Pac-Man*, no source code was available to GCC, so the team picked up where the *Ms. Pac-Man* team left off, reverse engineering, patching and hacking *Pac-Man* ROM dumps. "Unfortunately, whereas the *Ms. Pac-Man* team cranked out their work in a matter of weeks, it took us months to create *Jr.*," remembers Tim. The main issue was that scrolling had the effect of 'virtualising' the playfield: "Before *Jr. Pac-Man*, the playing field and the visible maze were one and the same. But we had to introduce into the code the concept of the 'logical' playing field as being distinct from the visible subset thereof, and capable of having portions off-screen."

To achieve this, Tim says the team had to reverse engineer and understand the different co-ordinate systems used to describe character positions and then patch them to handle the effects of scrolling: "For example, when monsters went off-screen, the code base had them wrap to the other side. We had to create in software the notion of a portion of the maze that was off-screen and make the monsters invisible when they were in that location."

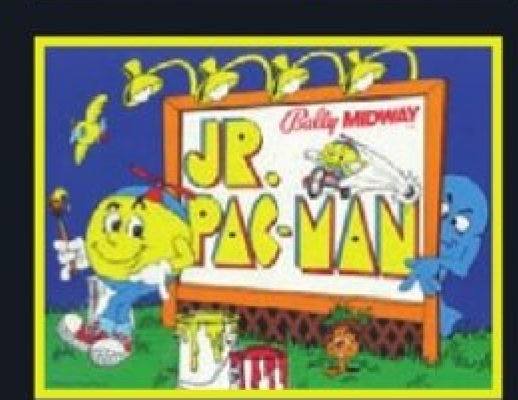
Along with updating portions of the underlying code, GCC had to update the game's visual design.



» [Arcade] Bonus items in *Jr. Pac-Man* expand dots they collide with and explode on encountering a power pellet.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** BALLY MIDWAY
» **DEVELOPER:** GCC FOR BALLY MIDWAY
» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **GENRE:** MAZE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £100 FOR A WORKING PCB; £500+ FOR A WORKING CABINET

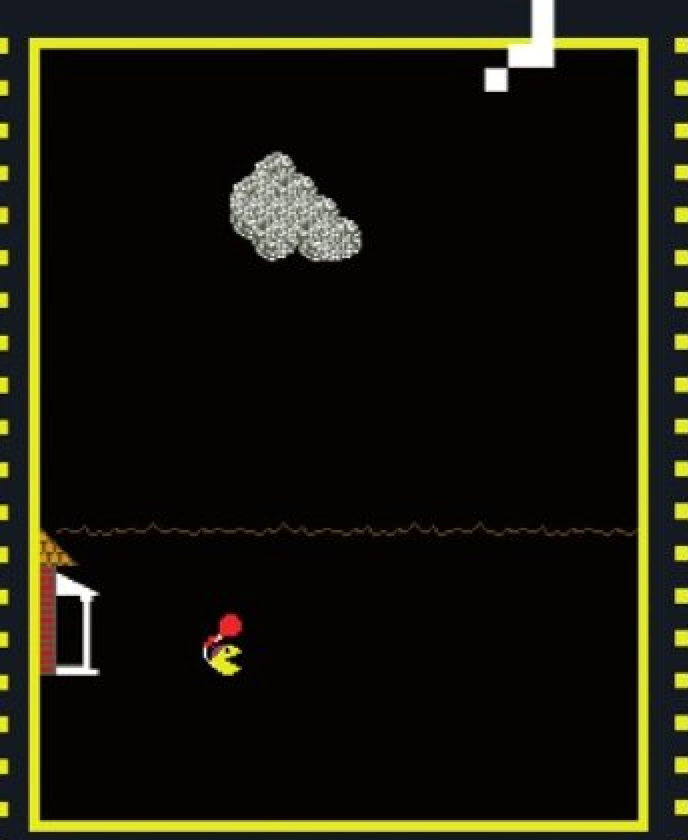


AHEAD OF THE GAME

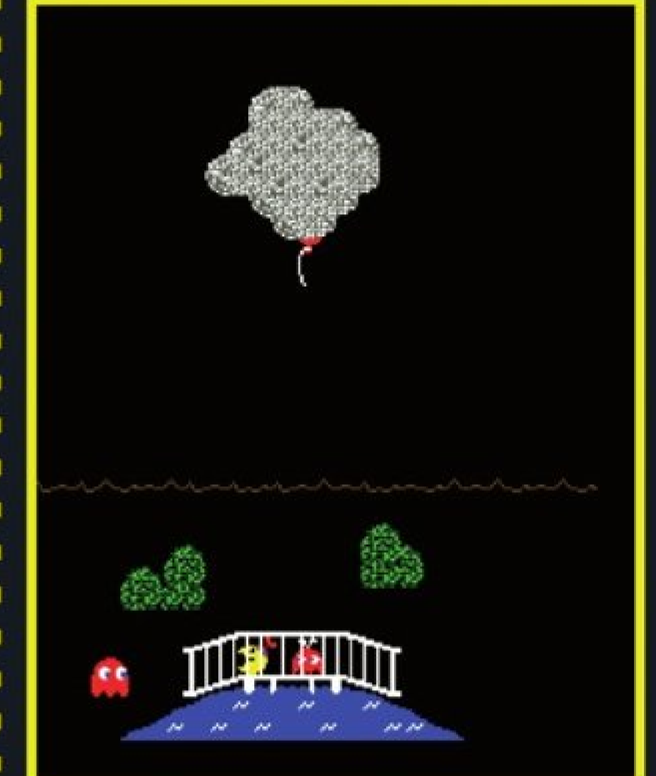
STAY ALIVE FOR long enough and you get levels where the monsters move faster than you. However, the way the game handles movement enables you to stay a step ahead, as Tim explains: "Monster movement was best described in terms of the playing field grid; the field was a tiling of individual pieces. Monster position was done using grid 'piece position', and turns weren't made until the monster was in the middle of the underlying grid piece. Therefore, monsters turned at right angles." The team then discovered that the Pac character's turning was not limited to right angles, but rather was calculated using pixel location. "You could shave a pixel or so of movement when going around corners," continues Tim. "In other words, the Pac character 'skidded' around the turns. If the monsters were hot on your tail, you could get away from them by making lots of turns."



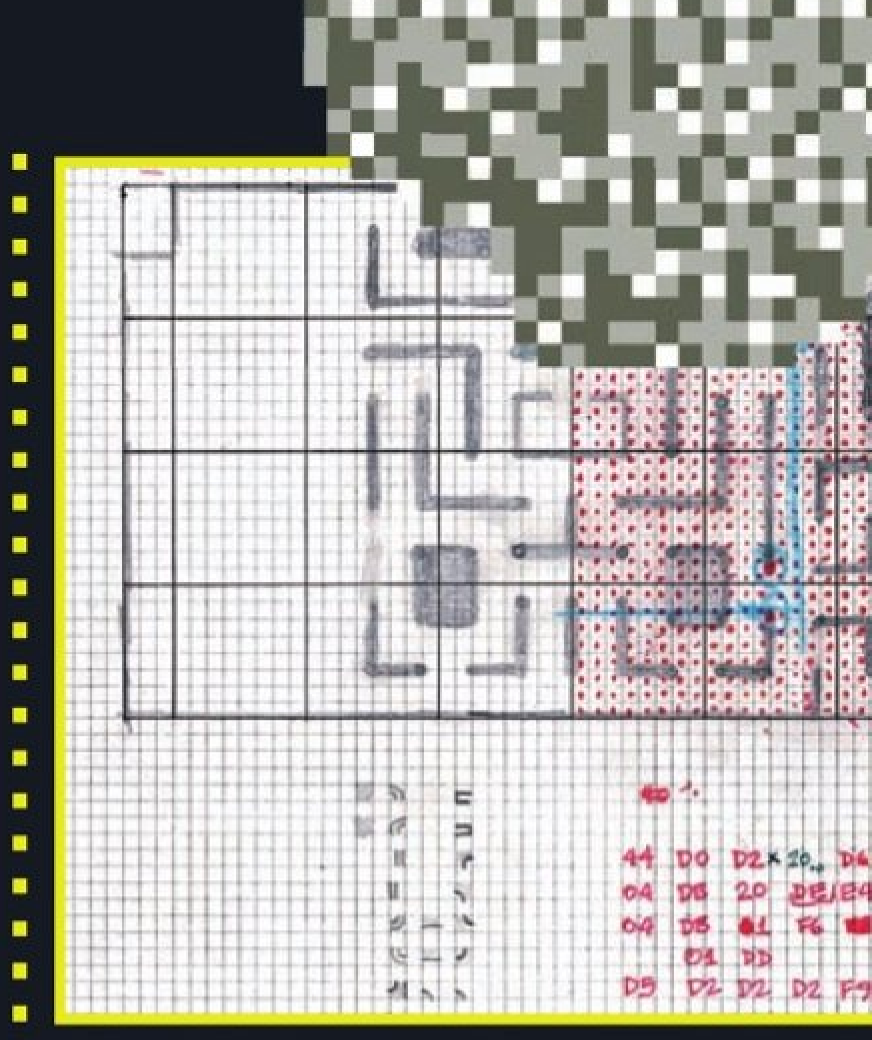
» [Arcade] In intermission one, Jr. meets Yum-Yum, but Ms. Pac-Man gobbles a power pellet, turning the monsters blue.



» [Arcade] Intermission two is a breakthrough in inter-species relations, with Jr. giving Yum-Yum a balloon.



» [Arcade] Intermission three. Blinky approaches! A balloon is lost! Star-crossed lovers flee! Hearts swirl about a bit!





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER MISSILE ATTACK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1981

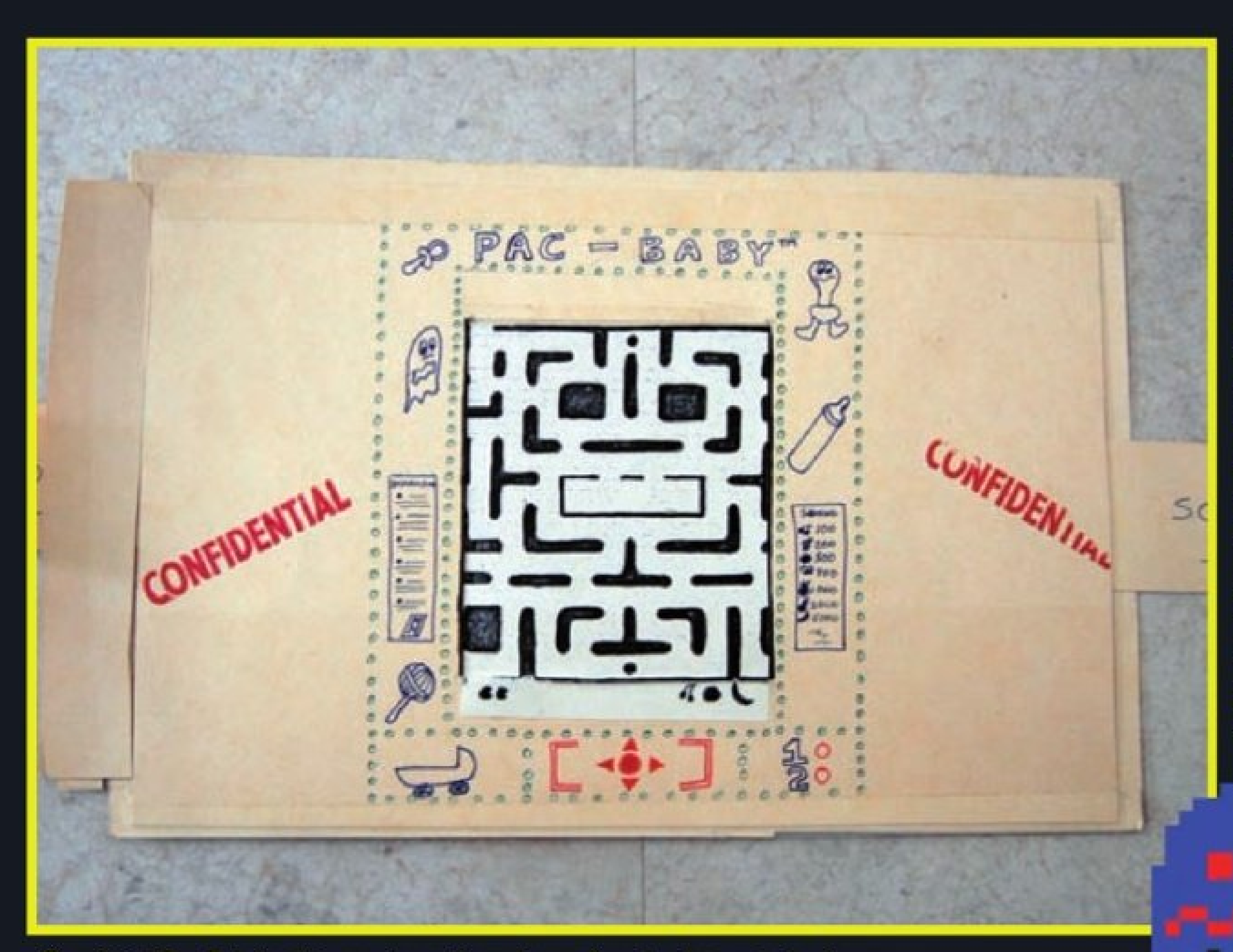
MS PAC-MAN
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1981

QUANTUM
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982

Tim credits Bruce Burns with that aspect of *Jr. Pac-Man*. "He added the twirling beanie," enthuses Tim, "and thus 'Junior' was born!" Bruce also pushed the hardware in other ways, developing new sounds and colours, and creating the game's lowercase font. Other team members then worked on new bonus items, mazes and animations. "We pushed the envelope of good taste on occasion," admits Tim. "In developing the game's 'death sequence', Bruce experimented with various depictions, but how do you gracefully depict the death of a 'Pac baby' anyway? In the end, we shipped the cute 'shrinking down to only the beanie' animation, but in-house versions were coarser. The most memorable had Jr. Pac-Man pause and then slowly ooze a red, blood-like substance. As it filled up around him, he shrivelled up, before the beak-like top part of his mouth fell off."

The team also created new intermission animations. First, while playing outside, Jr. Pac-Man meets mini-ghost Yum-Yum; in the second animation, Jr. offers Yum-Yum a balloon (while Blinky, presumably Yum-Yum's parent, lurks); in the final animation, the pair of nippers are confronted by Blinky, escape, and fall in love. In **Retro Gamer**'s mind, these animations prompt many questions. If Pac-Men live in houses, what's with the mazes? Why is Jr. being chased around (and seemingly regularly killed) by adult monsters? And if Jr. is the result of Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man getting it on, what would happen if nature took its course with Jr. and Yum-Yum? If Tim has answers, he's not sharing, but he recalls the animations were challenging to create, demanding new graphics and the software to drive them.

> **"The most memorable death scene had Jr. pause and slowly ooze a red, blood-like substance"**



» The original 'Pac-Baby' prototype, using cutting-edge cardboard-and-paper technology.

Ms. Pac-Man had eschewed the 'native' animation state-sequencing code from *Pac-Man*, and introduced a new animation engine and motion commands, and these were augmented to toggle additional hardware states at certain points in *Jr. Pac-Man*. "For example, *Pac-Man* hardware has a playing field with six moving sprites – or 'stamps' as we called them – that have a relative priority scheme. The priorities could be inverted, which is most noticeable when eating power pills," says Tim. "Usually, the monsters have higher priority and go on top of the Pac character, but this is reversed when a power pellet is consumed. As an extension of this, the playing field itself will either be under all the sprites or over all the sprites."

This technique was used throughout the animations. In one, a stork starts out in front of a cloud, then flies behind another; elsewhere, Jr. comes from inside a house, sits behind a fence, but then appears in front of it after going through a gate. "All this required orchestration of characters so that the priority change to put the playing field on top or bottom could be done without any visible distortion, such as making Ms. Pac-Man suddenly come through the walls of the house," adds Tim.

Reverse engineering also threw up other discoveries. Exact movement algorithms of monsters were found and adjusted to cater for unexpected interactions. "Before they went into hunt mode, they'd sometimes just wander off-screen, so we had to reverse a monster's direction to keep him visible when that happened," says Tim. "However, this had an odd effect in that if you scrolled some mazes with a monster at a specific point, you could trap him as he kept going back and forth, off-screen and reversing direction!" The lack of escape tunnels in *Jr. Pac-Man* also affected the monsters:

» Much of GCC's game planning took place on paper, before the team started coding.



» During development, Bruce and Tim printed and bound a disassembly of *Pac-Man* code, including the *Ms. Pac-Man* modifications.

"The gold monster is typically shy – he'll go after Jr. until he's within a certain range, and then he'll flee to his 'corner'. If you're between him and the corner, he'll look like he's coming right for you," explains Tim. "In *Ms. Pac-Man*, this corner was at the lower-left of the screen, but in the expanded *Jr. Pac-Man* mazes, it's towards the centre, which made the shy monster seem more dangerous."

Even though scrolling added a new twist, and the revised visuals made the game look fresh, the team wanted to add more. When poking around, unused grid elements were unearthed in the *Pac-Man* character ROM; one was a 'fat dot' and another resembled a flame. "We wondered what you'd use fat dots for, and thought that since eating dots slowed you down, fatter dots should slow you more but also give you more points," reasons Tim. The team found it was straightforward to hack the code to implement this, but then the decision had to be made regarding how these new dots appeared. "We thought about making alternate mazes 'fat dot' ones and other structural ideas, but soon decided that the bouncing bonuses could be a trigger, converting a normal dot into a bigger one," says Tim.

The discussion then switched to what to do with the bouncing toy, since there were no escape tunnels for it to leave through, unlike in *Ms. Pac-Man*. "We thought about having it just carry on indefinitely, perhaps converting dots back and forth, but that flame-like character was begging to be used, so the idea emerged to blow something up," remembers Tim, who experimented with the flame and character sequencing to create an explosion effect. "Then the question was what we should blow up. Blowing up a monster would have been cool, but would have introduced more boundary conditions to test than I wanted to bother with, and that idea was also a radical departure from how things were done in these games. Soon, the thinking evolved into directing the bouncing toy towards a power pellet. It created fat dots along the way, but if you let it linger, you ran the risk of losing a power pellet in a toy explosion!"

As a final strategic element, fat dots vanished if you lost a life.

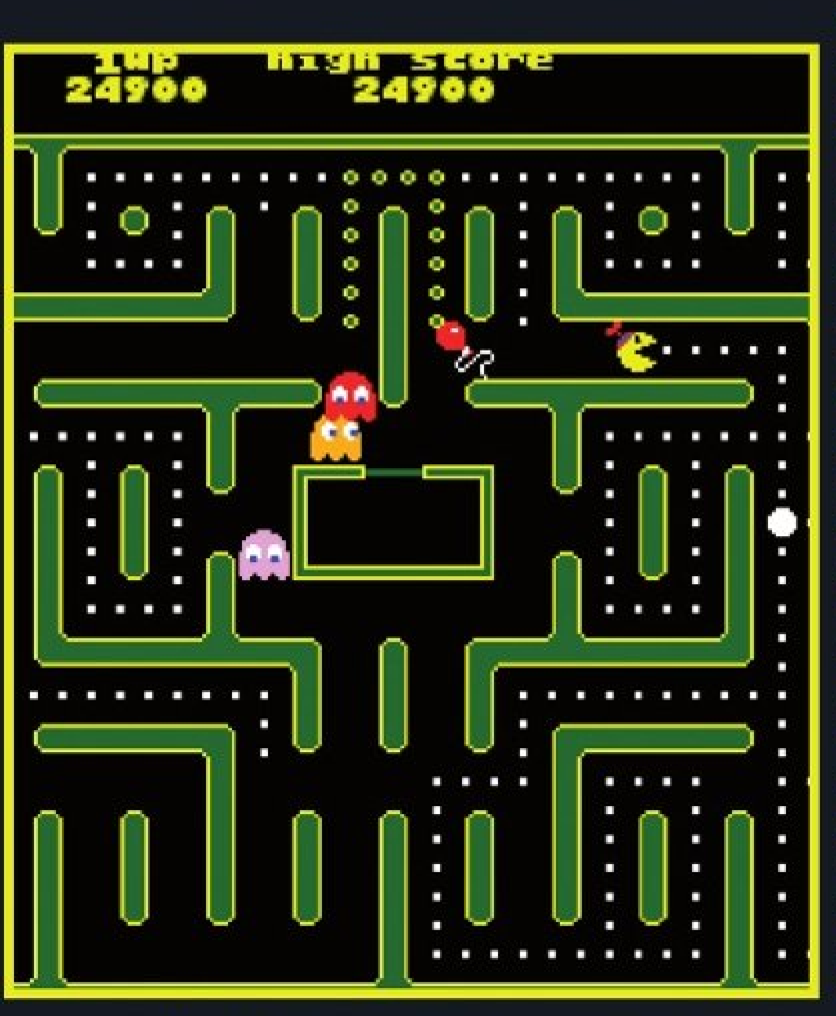
Doug thinks this nicely offered a dilemma to experienced players: "The new dots were worth five times as many points, but they were dangerous because they slowed you down even more. Players had to work a careful balance of managing the number of fat dots on the screen." Tim agrees: "Fat dots were worth more points, so you wanted to maximise their creation, but you had to grab the toy before it got destructive. But then the fat dots slowed you down, so you had to keep outmanoeuvring monsters to get at them. And if you died, you lost your accumulated uneaten bounty!"

Despite new strategic elements being introduced, *Jr. Pac-Man* proved divisive, largely because of the scrolling maze. "We wanted to make a major change in the difficulty of *Pac-Man*, and scrolling offered a new challenge," thinks Doug. "But for some, it was too difficult to track and we probably lost many players." Also, *Pac-Man* was no longer a new, exciting property, which meant few home ports and, ultimately, *Jr.* becoming an obscure entry in the series, rather than boasting the longevity of *Ms. Pac-Man*.

Jr. Pac-Man also marked the end of GCC's involvement with the series, although Tim says the door was left open for future instalments: "We'd created Yum-Yum and brainstormed how newer technology – faster processors, more memory, better graphics engines – could create different *Pac* experiences. We imagined a first-person perspective where you ate dots in front of your face, but we never acted on it." This lack of movement was down to a failing industry and GCC starting to consider *Pac-Man* tired: "The series was getting a little old by late 1983 and I don't think another enhancement kit was in the offing. Within a year, the videogame industry imploded anyway, and GCC moved on to other endeavours, entering the Apple Macintosh add-on market. The Pac Era had had its day."

GHOST IN THE MACHINE

ANOTHER OF THE interesting discoveries the team made when going through the game's code with a fine-toothed comb was the explanation of the phenomenon of Pac characters occasionally going right through monsters, as if they too were ghosts. "This was down to using the grid position for collision detection. Imagine, say, a monster being in the rightmost pixel of a grid location, heading right, and the Pac character being in the adjacent right grid piece, but in the leftmost pixel position, heading left. At the next vertical blanking period when all the sprite positions were updated, it would be possible for the Pac character to now be over the left grid position, and the monster now over the right grid position, with no collision ever detected because they were not over the same grid position at the same game moment," explains Tim. "Being engineers, we saw this as a bug, but after much discussion we left it in *Jr. Pac-Man*. Living through a collision was a 'freebie' to the casual player and leaving it in also left a 'quirk' that the most dedicated Pac-fanatics would recognise as being authentic."



» [Arcade] Later mazes include numerous sections with large vertical bars, making it harder to flee chasing monsters.

Thanks to **Steve Golson** for supplying photographs of *Jr. Pac-Man* development documents.

Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun

Apparently there's nothing more distressing than seeing a clown bawling their eyes out. Not only is this a waste of perfectly good face paint, but for every teardrop they shed somewhere a fairy is said to lose a front tooth. So there's plenty resting on the player in *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun*, which tasked them with putting on the greatest show on earth to earn the $10,000 owed to their 'Big Greedy Bank' and thus save the circus and the smiles of hundreds of winged pixies. If all that wasn't stressful enough the cynical lender has only gone and hired a lunatic named Fiendish Freddy to sabotage the show. Stuart Hunt discovers why Gray Matter's *Fiendish Freddy* was certainly a laughing matter.



JUGGLING

Help Jeffy Joe juggle power tools, knives, bowling balls, and even babies as they are tossed at him by his faithful sea lion assistant. Watch out for Freddy, though, who will distract your noisy helper to throw bombs and even missiles into the ring.



DIVING

Assuming the role of Horace the diver, players must leap from the high board pull a series of poses and land into containers of water that get increasingly smaller. Be mindful of Freddy, though, who will appear with a fan to blow you off course.



KNIFE THROWING

Here you must pop all of the balloons surrounding Knancy Knife. Obstructing your deadly plight is Freddy who will appear and lob smoke bombs into your path, making it impossible to see what you're aiming at.



TRAPEZE

Finola is high up in the rafters, and you have to help her swing from pillar to post (well, bar to bar) without falling through some skilled timing. Dawdle too long on one bar, though, and Freddy will appear armed with jetpack and scissors to cut the rope.



TIGHTROPE

Help Tony Tiptoe tippy toe across the high wire by helping him to centre his balance. Here, Freddy launches himself at Tony to try to knock him off balance, and in later levels will try to slice Tony in half using a circular saw. Slightly extreme, we thinks.



HUMAN CANNONBALL

The grand finale: the Human Cannonball. By taking into account the amount of gunpowder that has been packed into the cannon you must help Fernando hit his target. Take too long and Freddy will show up to sabotage the big finish.



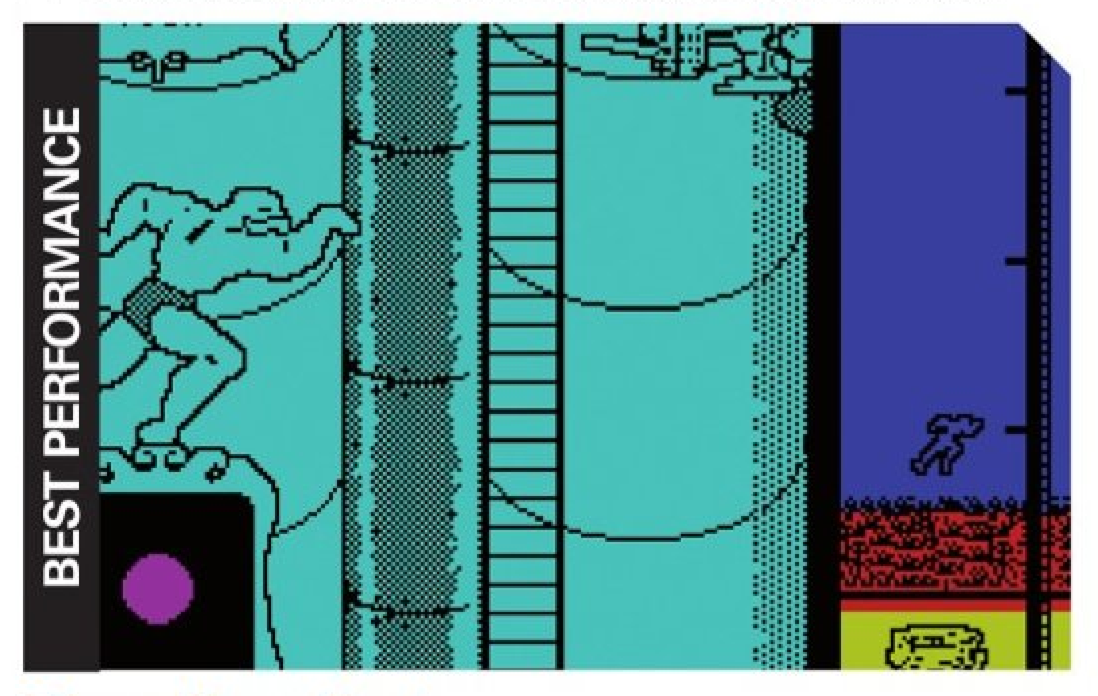


The greatest show on earth (apparently)

Aside from its wonderful cartoon graphics and sounds, what makes *Fiendish Freddy* a classic game is the variety of mini-games on offer, each covering acts you would expect to see at a circus. From power tool juggling to Diving, it was all there – apart from that one act where a woman wearing a suit of armour uses a tile cutter to create sparks. While Fiendish Freddy wasn't the first game to stumble on the idea of basing games on a circus scenario it is arguably the best in show, taking the template of games like Track & Field but applying a dollop of variety and humour to deliver something that felt really original.

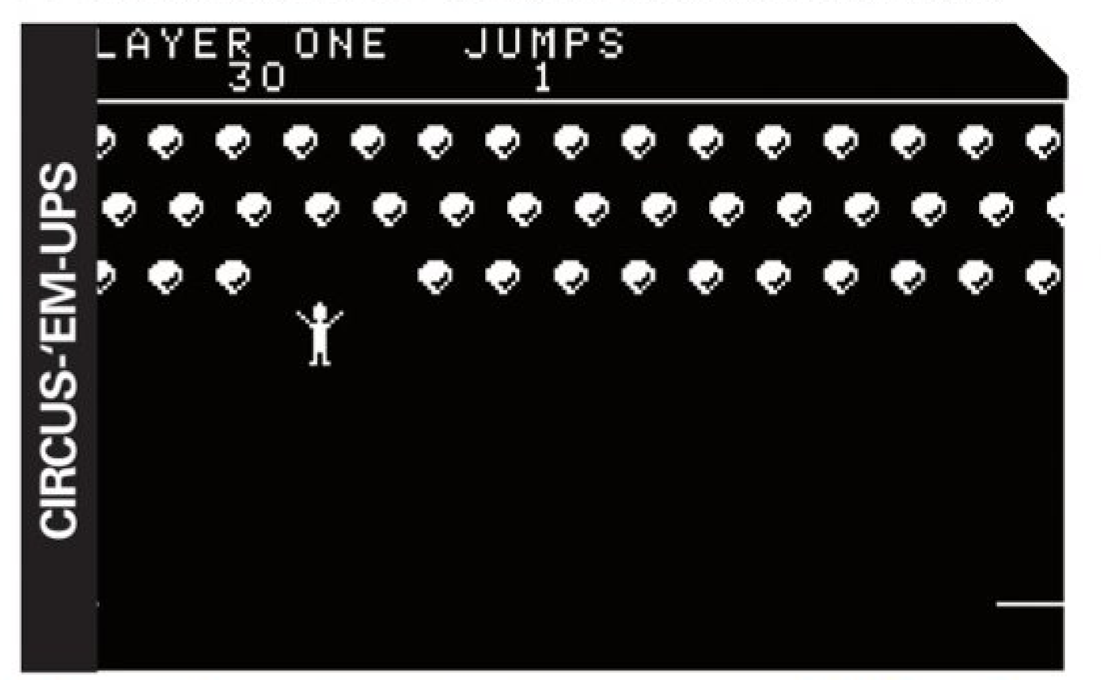
The clown with mad beef

Fiendish Freddy refers to the game's antagonist, Freddy: a crazed clown hired by the bank to sabotage the show. Freddy appears in a variety of ways to distract the player. In the first event, Diving, he appears holding a giant fan to blow the player off course during their fall, and in the Trapeze event he's strapped to a jetpack and will brazenly cut the rope to send your poor performer to a painful death, despite a number of witnesses. In another particularly gruesome encounter he can be seen trying to slice a tightrope walker clean in half with a circular saw – proof just how fiendish Freddy really is.



Dive, dive, dive!

Hmm… a tricky one, as all the events are enjoyable and your favourite will likely just come down to whatever mood you happen to be in. If you're in a knife-flinging mood then might like the Knife Throw, which is bloody tricky so you probably won't, to be honest. If you're a sucker for games that you can finish without much hair pulling then Tightrope is perfect for you. If we were offered front row seats for one act, though, it would have to be Diving. Getting to jump into increasingly small targets (beginning with a bath and moving on to a bucket, a brick (?) and a cup) is as entertaining as it sounds.



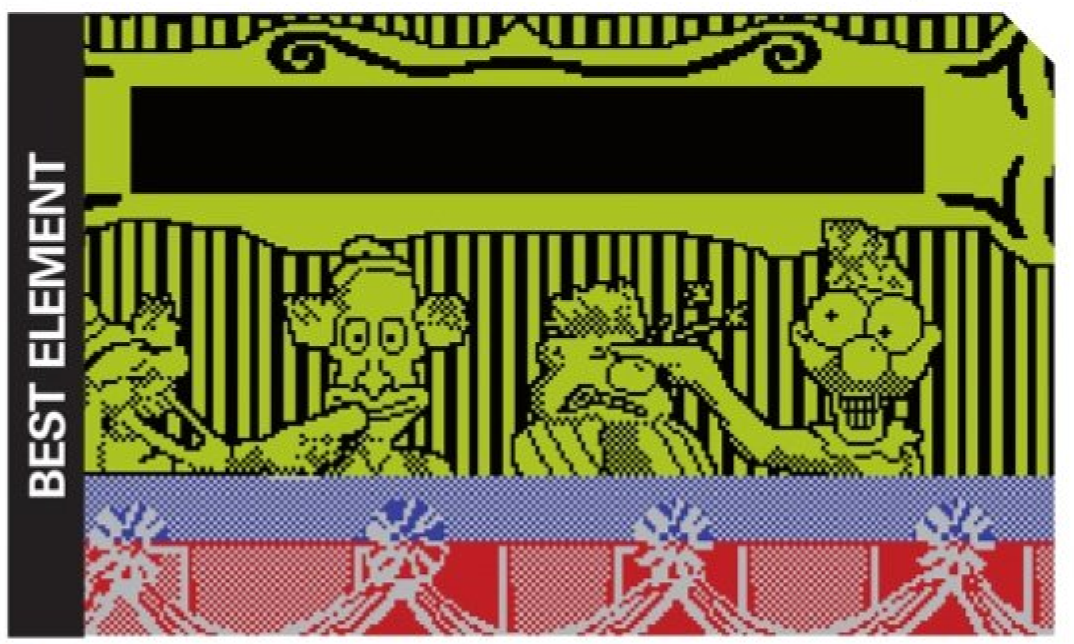
More circus games you may wish to try

Fiendish Freddy wasn't the first game to be based on the circus. Oh no, a few games beat Gray Matter to the punch. The first was probably *Circus* by Exidy. Released in 1977, this *Breakout*-style game saw players launch a clown up the screen to pop balloons using a see-saw. Konami also released *Circus Charlie* in 1984, which saw players steer its titular clown through six events including Tightrope Walking and Trapeze, as well as the popular 'Riding A Lion Through A Series Of Fire Hoops While Also Avoiding Blazing Pots'. Oh yeah, and lest we forget the dismal *Circus Games* – a more serious take on circus simulation by Tynesoft.



Party on your C64

If there's a game that should be remade for the Wii, and is perfectly suited to the family bonding fodder that seems to make up the majority of the console's releases, it has to be *Fiendish Freddy*. It's the perfect party game of the 8-bit era, as it allows up to five players to take turns in getting the best score. So the next time one of your kids accidentally drops a mountain bike on the Wii, fret not. Simply hook up your old computer, boot up *Fiendish Freddy* and watch their faces light up and then promptly look confused when they realise that waving the keyboard in the air is doing little to boost their score.



Funny games

One aspect that most gamers remember about *Fiendish Freddy* is its humour. It's certainly a game that doesn't take itself too seriously; it's littered with plenty of laugh out loud moments. As well as the game's funny intro, which shows the circus owner being handed his loan settlement writ by his bank, there's the funny and often violent death animations of the artistes too, and the weird ways that Freddy tries to disrupt their performances. And lest we forget the comical antics of the games panel of judges, who spend most of their time trying to beat, hurt and strangulate one another.

What the press said… ages ago



CRASH 94%

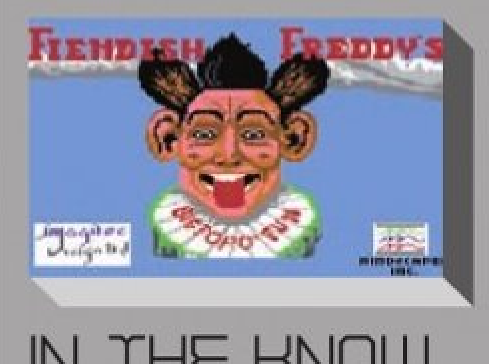
This is amazing. I could not believe my eyes when I first played *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun*! You could just as easily be watching a cartoon on the telly instead of playing on your Spectrum!

Zzap!64

The game's strongest point is undoubtedly its wicked sense of humour, which makes even losing very amusing.

What we think

Both comments echo our feelings of *Fiendish Freddy*. The game does feel like you're playing an interactive cartoon and the humour is definitely where a lot of the game's charm is found. It kind of like *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* meets an episode of *The Simpsons* - the one were Homer enrols to Clown College.

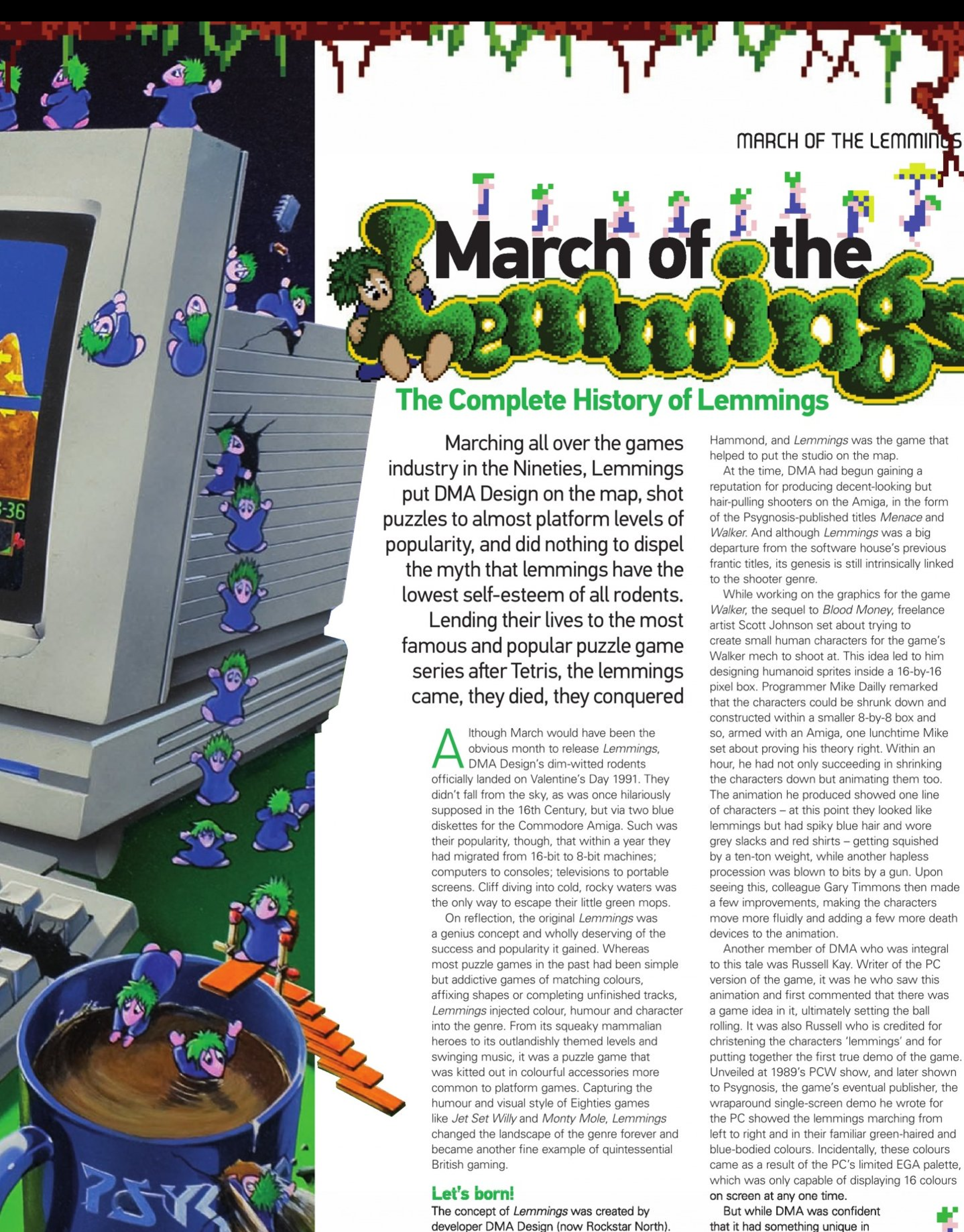


IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, AMIGA, C64, ST, PC, CPC
- **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- **DEVELOPER:** GRAY MATTER
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** SPORTS
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



Illustration courtesy of **Dave Rowe**



March of the Lemmings

The Complete History of Lemmings

Marching all over the games industry in the Nineties, Lemmings put DMA Design on the map, shot puzzles to almost platform levels of popularity, and did nothing to dispel the myth that lemmings have the lowest self-esteem of all rodents. Lending their lives to the most famous and popular puzzle game series after Tetris, the lemmings came, they died, they conquered

Although March would have been the obvious month to release *Lemmings*, DMA Design's dim-witted rodents officially landed on Valentine's Day 1991. They didn't fall from the sky, as was once hilariously supposed in the 16th Century, but via two blue diskettes for the Commodore Amiga. Such was their popularity, though, that within a year they had migrated from 16-bit to 8-bit machines; computers to consoles; televisions to portable screens. Cliff diving into cold, rocky waters was the only way to escape their little green mops.

On reflection, the original *Lemmings* was a genius concept and wholly deserving of the success and popularity it gained. Whereas most puzzle games in the past had been simple but addictive games of matching colours, affixing shapes or completing unfinished tracks, *Lemmings* injected colour, humour and character into the genre. From its squeaky mammalian heroes to its outlandishly themed levels and swinging music, it was a puzzle game that was kitted out in colourful accessories more common to platform games. Capturing the humour and visual style of Eighties games like *Jet Set Willy* and *Monty Mole*, *Lemmings* changed the landscape of the genre forever and became another fine example of quintessential British gaming.

Let's born!

The concept of *Lemmings* was created by developer DMA Design (now Rockstar North). Based in Dundee, the studio was established by David Jones, Mike Dailly, Russell Kay and Steve Hammond, and *Lemmings* was the game that helped to put the studio on the map.

At the time, DMA had begun gaining a reputation for producing decent-looking but hair-pulling shooters on the Amiga, in the form of the Psygnosis-published titles *Menace* and *Walker*. And although *Lemmings* was a big departure from the software house's previous frantic titles, its genesis is still intrinsically linked to the shooter genre.

While working on the graphics for the game *Walker*, the sequel to *Blood Money*, freelance artist Scott Johnson set about trying to create small human characters for the game's Walker mech to shoot at. This idea led to him designing humanoid sprites inside a 16-by-16 pixel box. Programmer Mike Dailly remarked that the characters could be shrunk down and constructed within a smaller 8-by-8 box and so, armed with an Amiga, one lunchtime Mike set about proving his theory right. Within an hour, he had not only succeeding in shrinking the characters down but animating them too. The animation he produced showed one line of characters – at this point they looked like lemmings but had spiky blue hair and wore grey slacks and red shirts – getting squished by a ten-ton weight, while another hapless procession was blown to bits by a gun. Upon seeing this, colleague Gary Timmons then made a few improvements, making the characters move more fluidly and adding a few more death devices to the animation.

Another member of DMA who was integral to this tale was Russell Kay. Writer of the PC version of the game, it was he who saw this animation and first commented that there was a game idea in it, ultimately setting the ball rolling. It was also Russell who is credited for christening the characters 'lemmings' and for putting together the first true demo of the game. Unveiled at 1989's PCW show, and later shown to Psygnosis, the game's eventual publisher, the wraparound single-screen demo he wrote for the PC showed the lemmings marching from left to right and in their familiar green-haired and blue-bodied colours. Incidentally, these colours came as a result of the PC's limited EGA palette, which was only capable of displaying 16 colours on screen at any one time.

But while DMA was confident that it had something unique in *Lemmings*, getting publishers to share in its enthusiasm proved to be difficult.



Downhearted but not undeterred, the team continued on without a publisher. It was around this time that David Jones joined the project as lead programmer.

Like most classic puzzle games, *Lemmings*' charm and appeal is its simplicity. Based on the myth that lemmings are a suicidal bunch, the game sees a troupe of them enter the stage through a trap door and then begin mindlessly walking with complete disregard for whatever dangers were in their way. The aim of the game was to get all of your lemmings, or the required quotient, safely to the level exit. To achieve this task you had to assign various roles to the lemmings to help them bash, dig, build and even self-detonate their way to wellbeing.

Lemmings took DMA around a year to develop, and its quick turnaround was largely attributed to the game's level editor. Inspired by the simple and user-friendly interface of the popular Amiga graphics utility Deluxe Paint, a program with which the team was familiar, it not only allowed levels to be constructed quickly, but also made it easy for each member of the team to contribute and chip in with designs.

In fact, it wasn't until many of the levels in *Lemmings* were actually finished that DMA finally found a publisher. Turned down initially by Psygnosis at the early demo stage, with working levels the publisher, now able to visualise the concept, snapped up the game. And so, following a period of testing and note-passing between both companies, further tweaks and refining to the game were made and *Lemmings* was finally ready for release. Hitting stores in February 1991, it sold over 50,000 copies in its first day of sales, smashing sales numbers of previous DMA titles. *Lemmings* found widespread acclaim and was praised for its originality and addictive brain-teasing properties.

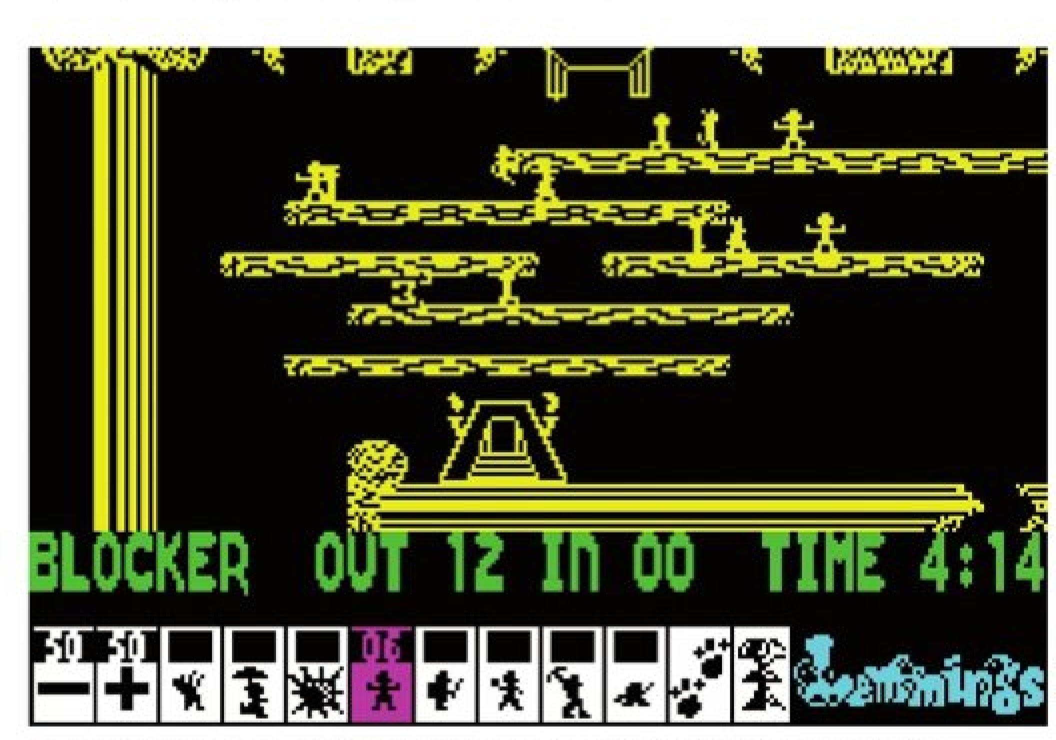
As a result of the reception, *Lemmings* became one of the most ported videogames of all time. Not only did it find release on popular consoles such as the Mega Drive, Super Nintendo and Game Boy, but also machines as diverse as the Philips CD-i, 3DO (in Japan), FM Towns Marty and TurboGrafx-CD. At one time even a trackball-controlled coin-op version by Data East was in development, but, though finished, it never saw release. A US prototype of the game is available to play via MAME, and while we're not sure how close it plays to the intended finished game, what's there plays like a straight port of the original, with the main differences being that it runs a bit smoother, the colours appear muted, and players can select the level on which they wish to start the game.

The reason why the coin-op version of *Lemmings* was never released remains uncertain, but rumour has it that the explanation could lie with it not being very well-received during focus testing. It's a theory that would certainly make sense. With arcades more commonly reserved for high-octane, money-grabbing joyrides, *Lemmings* certainly isn't what you would consider typical arcade fodder. Especially as players who got half-decent could potentially be playing for hours on a single credit – hardly a pleasing sight for arcade operators.

To capitalise on the game's popularity, DMA and Psygnosis quickly followed up *Lemmings* with *Oh No! More Lemmings* later that year. An expansion pack for the original game, it was released in two forms: a standalone version and data disk format that required the original game to run. *Oh No!* featured 100 new single-player stages and a handful of new multiplayer levels. Like most early expansion packs, it didn't bring anything new to the series and its gameplay keeps to the original eight tools. But while *Oh No!* clearly looked to quickly and cheaply eke more from *Lemmings*' popularity, the level designs don't quite match the quality of those in the original



» [Arcade] An arcade version of *Lemmings* was developed by Data East. While never released, a prototype of the game can be played thanks to MAME.



» [Spectrum] *Lemmings* even made it to the Spectrum. It might have been fiddly to play in monochrome, but the game's charm still shined through.



» [Arcade] *Lemmings* isn't suited to the coin-guzzling instant-action approach of most coin-ops of the time, which makes the fact that it never made it out fairly unsurprising.



"Once able to visualise the concept, Psygnosis snapped up the game"

Meet The Tribes

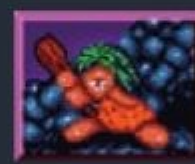
SHADOW



This weird shadow tribe are a team of SAS-style operatives who dress like ninjas. Their stages are set in towns under the cover of darkness and are generally full of booby traps and sneaky hazards that only a master spy could outfox. Good thing these guys don't wander blindly into them, then. Oh…



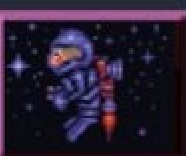
CAVELEM



It's very much back to basics for this Stone Age tribe, whose land has a prehistoric theme. Their stages are full of volcanic rocks, sticks and fossilised dinosaur remains. There's even the occasional probably extinct creature to lend a hand to the lemmings' plight as they head off on their quest.



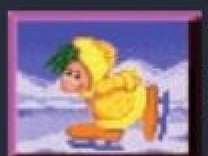
SPACE



The most impressive-looking zone in *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* takes place on a space station, replete with shuttles, cranes, space rock and even a cameo from what appears to be the Power Loader from *Aliens*. Sadly, the lemmings can't make use of them. And how is there outer space on this island?



POLAR



This tribe clearly got the iffy-smelling end of the stick when the lemmings split off into groups. This area is punishingly cold and features stages in which fans of the Christmas spin-off games will feel right at home. The lems on this stage are also a worrying shade of hypothermic blue.



HIGHLAND



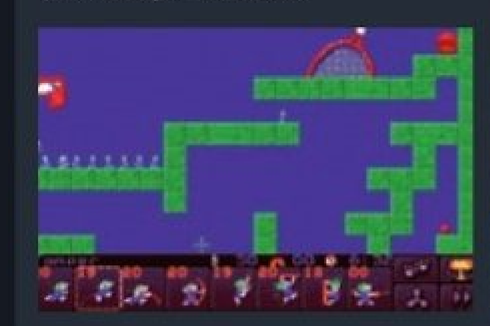
Given that DMA Design was based in Dundee, it's understandable that the studio would look to instil its Scottish heritage into a tribe, and so the Highland lems can be seen as a clan designed entirely out of nepotism. Anyway, this zone is based on the weather-beaten glens of the Highlands.



SPORTS



The most nimble and athletic of all the tribes, these sporty types should presumably be the first to reach the island's centre. Their zone is pretty bland in comparison to the rest, featuring artificial turf flooring and various sporting goods strewn around the place, providing obstacles.









This circus-trained tribe are the most acrobatic of all the lemmings, which is very handy as their zone is full of circus objects to circumvent, including barbells and even cannons for the lemmings to alight and fire themselves from. Pretty dangerous for a place of fun.



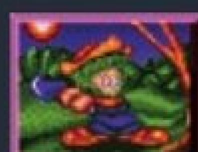
BEACH



This tribe certainly lucked out by getting to live out their days in a permanent holiday resort. These sun-kissed lems must negotiate stages littered with beach items and accessories, including beach balls, beach huts and deckchairs. Life for these guys sure is beachy.



OUTDOOR



Given the obvious affinity they have for walking, you'd expect lemmings to be keen ramblers. The great outdoors is the theme for this stage, and features puzzles set inside dense woodland dressed with giant flora and oversized shrubbery. It's a pretty boring place, to be honest.



EGYPTIAN



We think DMA missed a trick by not having the lems walk like Egyptians in this stage. Still, we guess it could have been quite off-putting. This zone is caked in yellow sand, set inside ancient Egyptian tombs, and features plenty of sphinxes and pyramidal structures to circumnavigate.



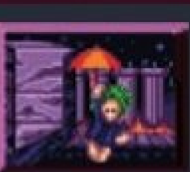
MEDIEVAL



This zone is home to a tribe of lemmings who are clearly stuck in the past because they enjoy a bit of LARPing. Their land is themed to the Middle Ages, and so castles, battlements and ramparts form the theme for this stage. The levels are decorated with uninviting stone gargoyles.

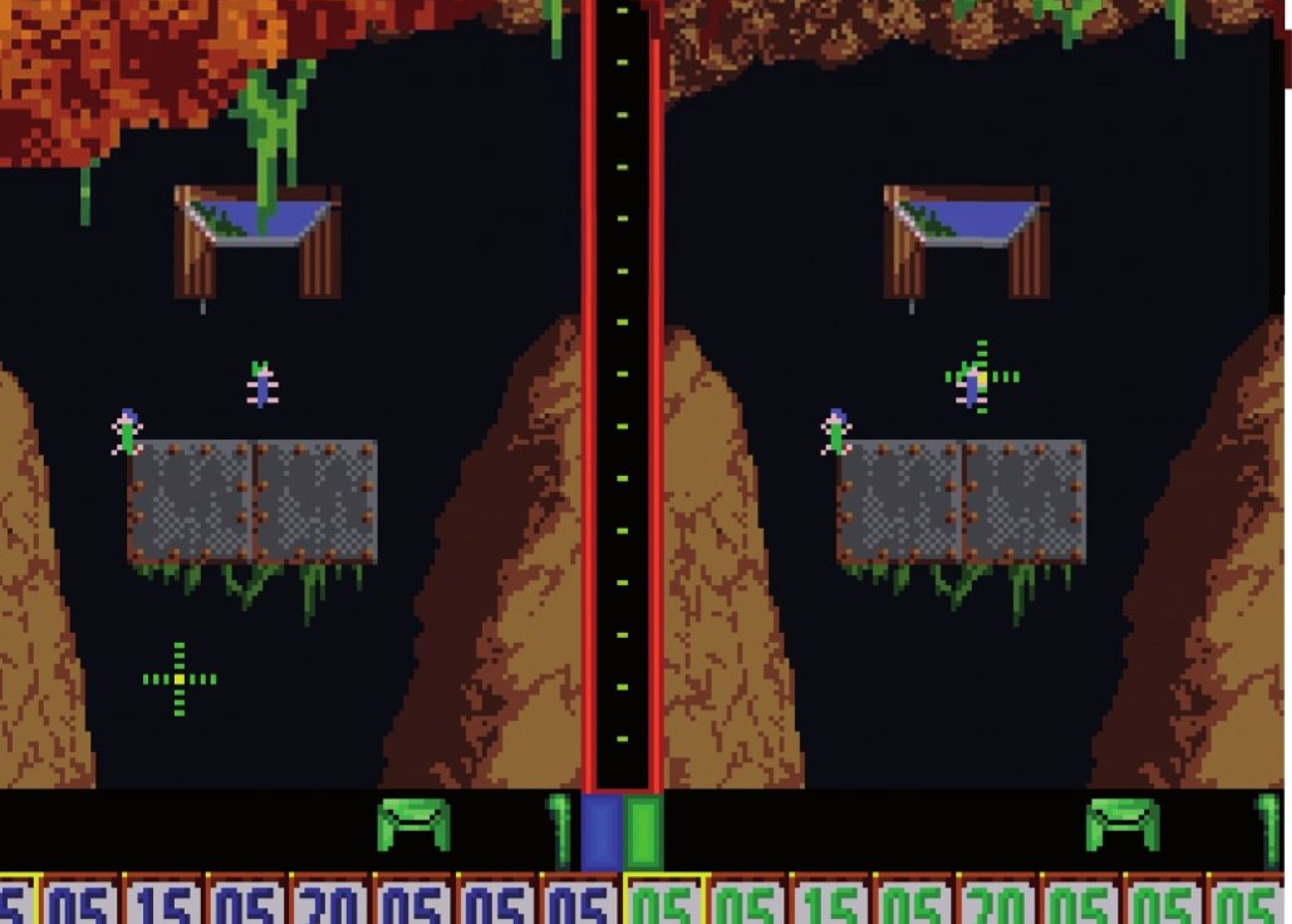






As their name implies, classic lemmings are a tribe who like to stay true to tradition. Not only are the levels in this zone all reminiscent of those in the first game, but this tribe can only make use of their original eight skills as well. They're also the only lems who can use the Blocker tool.







» [PC] *Oh No! More Lemmings* was an expansion rather than a full sequel and so offered more of the same for fans of the original.

Lem vs Lem

WHILE WE'VE DISCUSSED the brilliance of *Lemmings* as a single-player game, we shouldn't forget its amazing split-screen multiplayer mode. Comprising 20 stages that were especially designed for two players to go head-to-head in, it quickly proved a popular addition with fans. The mode sees two players competing against each other using their individual tribe, which are differentiated in the game by two colours. Able to only give commands to their coloured lemmings, the winner of the game is the player who successfully manages to shepherd the most lemmings, irrespective of colour, into their goal. Shovelling more tension into the action was the fact that in later stages the two tribes would cross paths, allowing the opportunity for players to interfere with and sabotage their opponent's game. While omitted from the PC version, multiplayer did make it into the Atari ST conversion and a number of the Sunsoft-developed console ports. It's just another aspect that makes *Lemmings* a fiendishly addictive experience, and so we can't understand why, with the exception of *Christmas Lemmings* in 1994, it was dropped in DMA's sequels.

– and this is also reflected in the erratic complexity of the puzzles. Levels begin as relative cakewalks but soon become torturous crawls across hypodermic needles and broken glass. Or maybe that's just us being dramatic.

A tribe called (on a) quest

Given the criticism that *Oh No! More Lemmings* received for not pushing the series in any new directions, there was really only one natural step for a true sequel to take: introduce new abilities and skills for players to get to grips with. Bring on *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*, which did just that.

While the core 'guide the lemmings to safety' concept remained, DMA made a number of notable tweaks to the formula in *Lemmings 2*. This included a little over six times the number of skills as were in the original game for a total of 51, and also a story explaining why the critters are once again insisting on risking their little lives in the name of interactive entertainment. The story told that the lemmings from the first game had decided to live out the remainder of their days on the peaceful Lemming Island. Here they divide themselves into various themed tribes, each relating to the 12 territories of the isle. An undisclosed amount of time elapses, and each tribe grows in number and learns the abilities that best allow them to survive in their respective zone. But their peace is soon threatened when they learn that a great darkness is about to spread across the island. To prevent their extinction, each tribe must journey to the island's centre and combine 12 pieces of a sacred talisman to summon a flying boat that will ferry them to safety. It's as good a story as any, we suppose.

As well as adding a narrative and an exhausting number of new abilities, the way in which players progressed in the game was also changed. In *Tribes*, completion of a stage only requires players to get a single lemming to the exit. With one saved, any lemmings on screen would then be automatically whisked to the next stage. However, this didn't mean you could sacrifice the lives of 99 per cent of your tribe for the salvation of one. Unlike in the original, their numbers weren't replenished at the start of a new stage. As such, players had to be mindful of a depleting lemming populace, otherwise they'd come unstuck by not having enough lemmings to complete the latter stages in the game. Considerately, the 120 levels were divided into bite-sized batches of ten, and when caught in the crossfire of an explosion or falling from a great height, lemmings now became dazed for a few moments rather than dying outright like in the previous game. The strategy you employ is very often a different approach to the original, as success can be achieved by cordoning off most of the tribe and then allowing a single lemming or a small number of them to venture out and find the exit.

While some fans liked this new approach, there were just as many who didn't, and reviews reflected this. Not only did *Lemmings 2* not score as highly, but it also wasn't as successful as the original, although this could have had something to do with it not receiving a fraction of the number of conversions that the original *Lemmings* received.

Following the release of *Lemmings 2*, DMA Design then released a festive-themed version. Titled *Christmas Lemmings* (aka *Holiday Lemmings*), it was a short game that was inspired by two earlier freebie Christmas-themed *Lemmings* demos put out by DMA in 1991 and 1992. This year, however, a less charitable DMA cheekily charged fans for its annual *Lemmings* Christmas present, justifying its actions by offering 32 levels. *Christmas Lemmings* reverts back to the look and gameplay of the first game, with the lemmings relying on their original eight skill sets. Dressed in festive bobble hats and Santa suits, the lemmings had to negotiate stages decorated with snow and bunting. Proving a popular spin-off among fans, DMA followed up with a retail sequel the following year. *Christmas Lemmings 1994* featured another 32 Christmas-themed stages, as well as the previous 32 from the 1993 version and a two-player mode.

Tell me again Story-Keeper!
Tell me of the prophecy.

The next sequel not only marked the final *Lemmings* game from DMA before the licence was sold to Psygnosis, but also the final *Lemmings* game for the Amiga and the final true 2D game in the series. Unfortunately, though, it's probably the least popular instalment in the series. Titled *All New World Of Lemmings* (also known as *The Lemmings Chronicles*, though many fans refer to it as *Lemmings 3*), it once again tasked players with guiding the misguided rodents to safety, but both the art style and gameplay were dramatically altered for the game. *New World* featured larger, cuter, cartoon-looking lemmings and a simplified tool interface. Instead of giving players all the tools they would need to complete a puzzle from the outset, many of the required actions were now scattered around the stages for the lemmings to pick up.

The lemmings now had unlimited use of five basic actions: Block, Run (changes a blocker into a walker), Jump (allows the lemming to hop over obstacles), and a Use and Drop button to interact with the tool objects. Unsurprisingly, many didn't gel with the new look or approach. DMA also carried over the previous *Lemmings 2* method of progression, and added further headaches in annoying enemy creatures for the lemmings to avoid. If the classic *Lemmings* recipe was two parts puzzle game to one part platformer, this sequel can be seen as the unsuccessful results of having those measurements switched.

Featuring just three of the 12 tribes, at the time of *New World*'s release it was reported that Psygnosis was planning to release a further three updates to the game, starring the remaining nine. However, likely due to modest sales and middling reviews for the game, the sequels never materialised.

"While some fans liked Lemmings 2's approach, there were just as many who didn't"

The jump to 3D

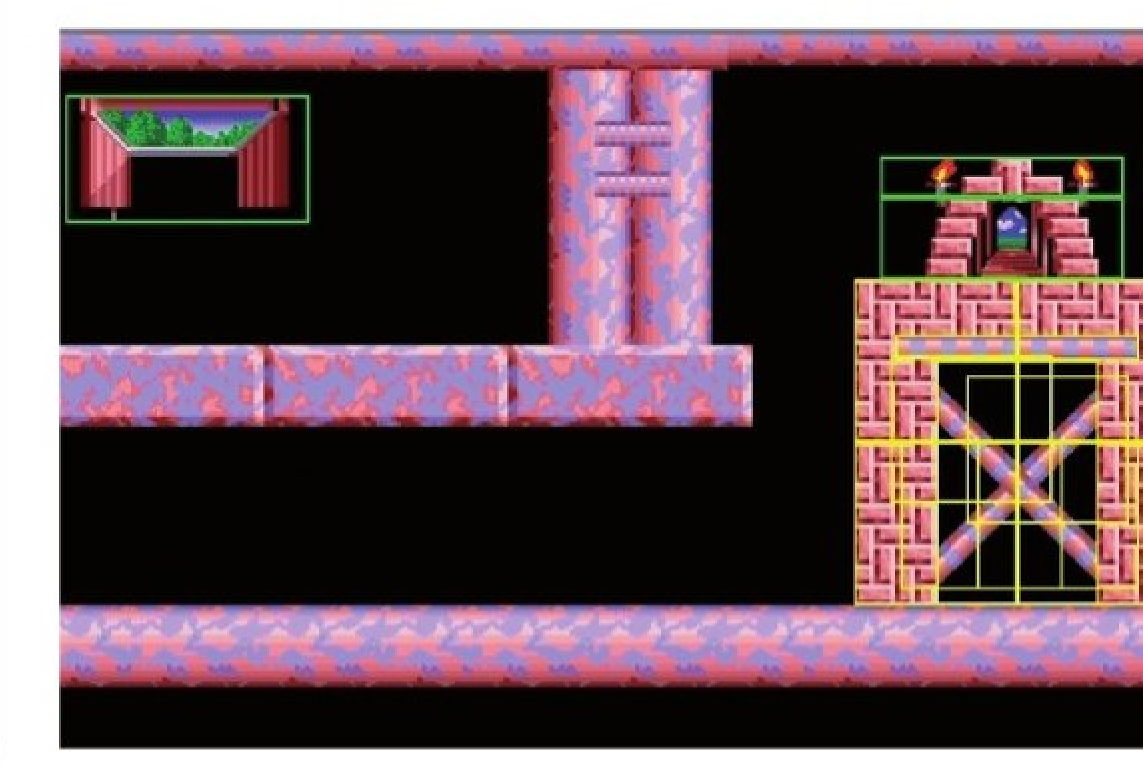
Despite the huge impact that the fifth generation of polygon-loving consoles had on 3D gaming, it would be fair to assume that no one would have predicted that *Lemmings* would make the jump to a third dimension. Psygnosis certainly felt that the transition was possible, however, and enlisted developer Clockwork Games to make it happen.

To its credit, in many respects *3D Lemmings* is perhaps closer in 'feel' to the original *Lemmings* than any of the previous sequels. Released for the PC, Saturn and PlayStation, it not only saw a return to the original skills – with the exception of a new and necessary Turner tool, which allowed a lemming to direct their compatriots 90 degrees in either direction – but also some brilliantly clever level design, as well as a return to the original 'save as many as you can' progression.

The biggest thing you have to wrap your head around is learning how to use the game's camera to your advantage – in some instances this is essential to completing the more taxing stages later in the game. Having to think in an extra dimension takes some getting used to, but to the game's credit it seems to understand this fact. Not only does it allow you practice using the various



AT ONE POINT DMA was planning to include a level constructor with the original *Lemmings*, allowing fans to construct their own stages in the game. However, wary of the time it would take to successfully plot and design a working *Lemmings* level – you can't just plonk a load of rocks and pillars on a stage and call mission complete – the idea was dropped. Fans actually had a long wait until they finally got the opportunity to construct their own levels. The PSP version by Team17, released in 2006, marks the first *Lemmings* game to ever officially include a level creator. However, it's not actually the first level editor for *Lemmings*, as some clever so-and-sos took it upon themselves to construct their own. LemEdit and Lemmix are two freeware *Lemmings* level creators for the PC, which allow you to prune and tweak the stages in the original game. Use of them requires you to have a copy of the PC version of *Lemmings*.







» [Amiga] The '*Xmas*' spin-offs were so successful that a total of five were made, including a version for *3D Lemmings*.





The Lost Lemmings

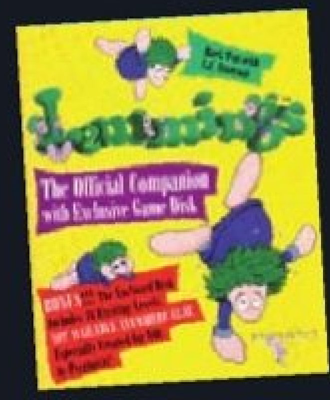


The lesser-known Lemmings games and spin-offs that you may not have heard of

Lemmings Handheld Game
Released by Systema, this portable LCD *Lemmings* game is nothing like the original. It's a scrolling platformer that sees you helping a lemming jump various obstacles and smash through walls with a pickaxe.

Covox Lemmings
This is a special version of *Lemmings* that was produced as a promotional pack-in with Covox PC sound cards. What makes this edition special is the fact that it features an additional seven stages over the original, as well as a special 'Covox' stage.

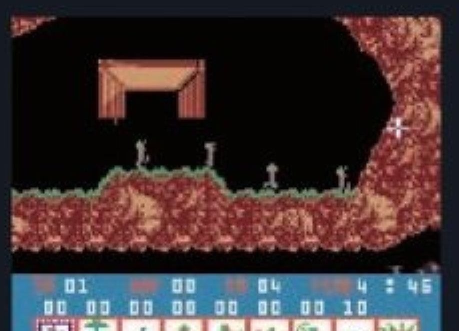




Lemmings: The Official Companion Book
Given the perplexing nature of *Lemmings*, it was a given that a solution book would sell, and a canny Psygnosis decided to capitalise on the idea quickly by publishing one itself. This particular guide book is unusual, though, in that it came packed with a disk featuring an additional 16 new stages.

3D Lemmings Winterland
This is a 3D version of *Christmas Lemmings* and was packed with *3D Lemmings* during the festive period. The game came on a separate disc and was only included with the PC version. It features six specially designed *3D Lemmings* stages that are all winter-themed.





Vs Lemmings
While it might sound like a standalone *Lemmings* game, *Vs Lemmings* is actually just the fancy-sounding Japanese title for the Game Boy Color port of *Lemmings* and *Oh No! More Lemmings*. Incidentally, this double pack was also released for the PlayStation.

functions and tools – an option introduced in *Lemmings 2* – but it also has a very handy replay mode that recounts your previous attempt and allows you to rejoin at any point, saving you the time and effort of having to redo the bits you know you did correctly. But the indisputable thing that makes *3D Lemmings* awesome is that it's the first *Lemmings* game to finally solve that irritating issue of trying to pick a single lemming from a crowd. Previous games saw you wasting time and tools waving your cursor around a twitching mess of green and blue pixels, hoping that your cursor touched a piece of a lemming facing the right direction and area to make the desired use of the tool you've selected. Here, the problem is solved by allowing you to select any lemming in the game before administering an order. And you can also make use of a handy thing called VL (Virtual Lemming) mode, a function that slots you into the body of a selected lemming and allows you to see what they see.



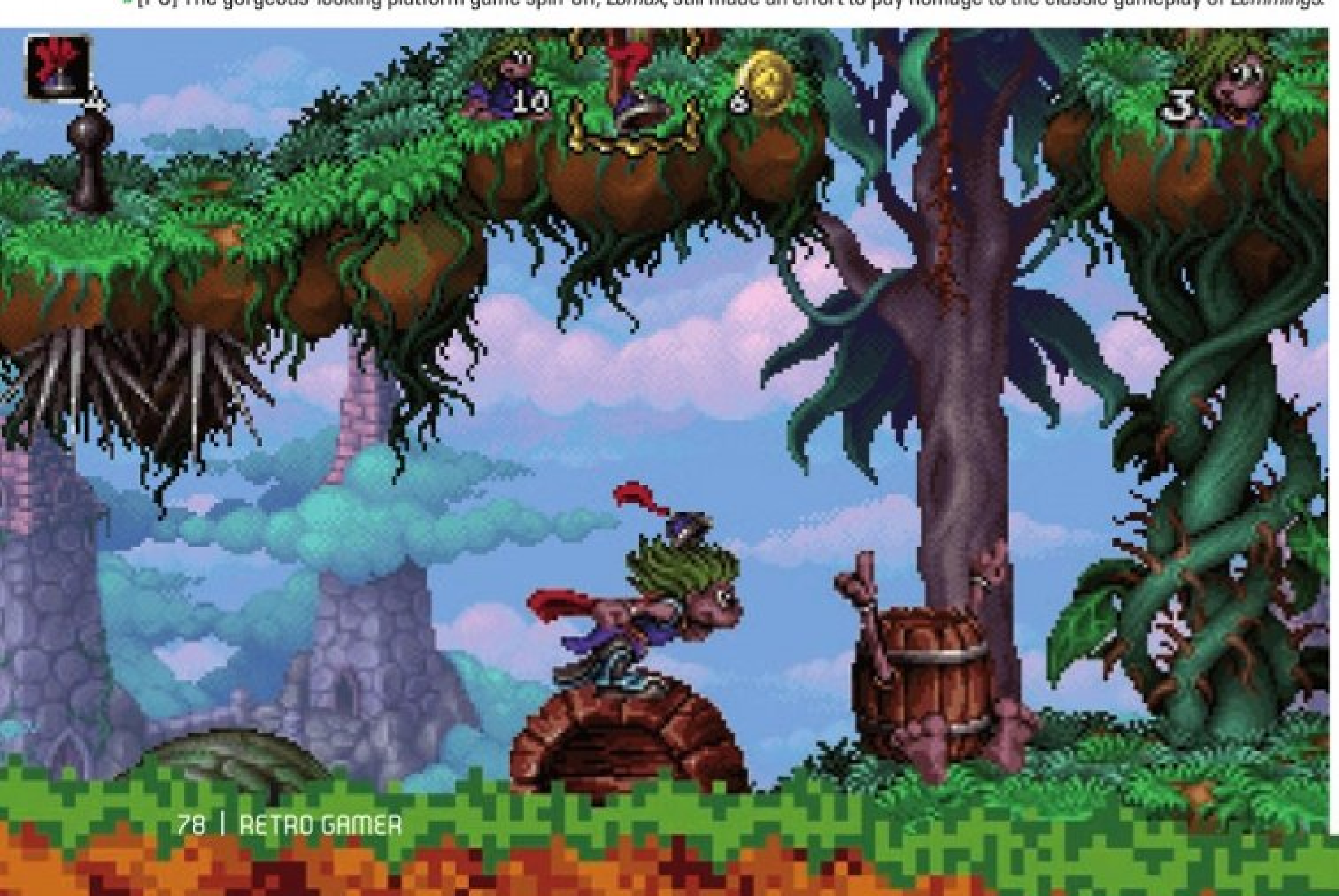
After leaving DMA in 1993, programmer Russell Kay set up his own development studio in Dundee called Visual Sciences. It was here that he and the *Lemmings* series would cross paths again, when Psygnosis asked the studio to develop its next *Lemmings* game. *Lemmings Paintball*, released in 1996, was a big departure from previous titles. Similar in style to *Syndicate*, of all things, the game was a fun but bizarre isometric shoot-'em-up with loose puzzle elements. Assigned a troupe of four lemmings, each armed with a paintball gun, players had to battle an opposing team of enemy lemmings across 100 levels to capture flags scattered around the stages. Players could control either a single lemming or move the team as a complete unit, and certain instances called on the lemmings to interact with switches, catapults and other random objects to get around the level. A first for the series, the game also featured online multiplayer, allowing two people to go head-to-head in a game of capture the flag. Released exclusively for the PC, the game, unsurprisingly, went largely unnoticed.

In 1997, *Lemmings* finally made the jump into full platform game territory for the PC and PlayStation spin-off title, *The Adventures Of Lomax* (aka *Lomax*). Co-written by Erwin Kloibhofer and Henk Nieborg, whose previous collaborative efforts included the Psygnosis platformer *Flink* and the Amiga hack-and-slash *Lionheart*, *Lomax* was typical of the duo's previous games, boasting stunningly vibrant visuals coupled with solid gameplay.

Players assume the role of the titular Lomax, a lemming from the medieval tribe who must embark on a quest to save his pals, who have all been transformed into enemies in the game by an evil alchemist. In a nice wink to classic *Lemmings*, Lomax has the ability to pick up and make use of a number of different practical powers in the game, some of which were clearly influenced by the traditional tools of his trade. While *Lomax* does fall into the realm of standard platformer, it's a wonderfully presented game with visuals very reminiscent of Ubisoft's *Rayman* series, and is certainly worth tracking down if you're a *Lemmings* fan.

The next *Lemmings* game to find release was developed by Take-Two Interactive. Released in 2000, *Lemmings Revolution* was another PC-only sequel that was clearly more inspired by the original *Lemmings* than the sequels. The big difference here is that levels are wrapped around a cylinder, which the player can rotate to get a full perspective of its dangers and pitfalls. The footprint of the original can be seen throughout *Revolution*, with the original eight tools once again making a return and its 3D visuals capturing its iconic ant farm look. Moreover, other additions and changes that *Revolution* makes are really quite subtle. In addition to classic lemmings you now have water and acid

» [PC] The gorgeous-looking platform game spin-off, *Lomax*, still made an effort to pay homage to the classic gameplay of *Lemmings*.





NO JOB TOO SMALL

Lemmings are a versatile bunch, capable of some quite obscure skills...





variants, which can swim and survive a bath in the acid respectively. Also introduced are various environmental objects for the lemmings to interact with. These include speed-up and anti-gravity panels, floors that break away, and even teleportation portals. *Revolution* also unfurls via branching stages. This means that if you do get stuck, just like in the Gold Run in *Blockbusters*, you could progress via a different route to finish the game. *Lemmings Revolution* ranks as another strong entry in the series. It successfully walks that delicate line of feeling fresh and playing faithfully to its source.

The final true *Lemmings* game was first released in 2006 and in many ways came to prove what most had known all along: the original *Lemmings* is the best in the series. Developed by Team17, *Lemmings*, as its title implies, is a remake of sorts. But one that features 36 new levels on top of the original 120 and a level editor – a first for the series, at least officially – which, while a little cumbersome, allowed players to create and share stages.

Given Team17's renowned background in the puzzle genre with its *Worms* series, it should come as no surprise that 2006's *Lemmings* is another strong sequel in the canon. Clearly influenced by the cartoony art style of *Worms*, aesthetically it blends both worlds together.

A PS2 version of *Lemmings* was also released in the same year. Known as *EyeToy: Lemmings*, this spin-off added a number of levels that supported gesture recognition through Sony's webcam accessory to allow players to use their body to bridge gaps and shepherd the lemmings to safety.

A third downloadable PS3 version of Team17's *Lemmings* update also saw release a year later on PSN. Keeping the same art style as its portable and PS2 counterparts, this port only featured 40 levels – all of which were new, however – and the multiplayer and the map editor were also dropped. On top of this, it also fiddled with the gameplay by dropping some of the tool power-ups into the actual levels, in a similar style to *All New World Of Lemmings*.

Looking back at the series in its entirety, it becomes clear that *Lemmings* is a franchise that showcases the difficulties faced by developers if they get a concept so wonderfully tight and perfect first time round. It's arguable that most of *Lemmings*' charm, success and popularity comes from the potent hangover from how innovative the game felt back in the early Nineties. The problem, as anyone tasked with following up *Tetris* will attest, is that it was always going to be impossible for any sequel to replicate its impact. For DMA and Psygnosis to not push the franchise in new directions would have been sending the lemmings to their doom. As a result, that wonderful formula of the original was tweaked, and so with each new sequel, and every new idea added, inevitably some aspect from the original was either lost or dropped. We guess you could dispute the notion that the little critters were doomed the minute the trap door opened and they fell into 'Just Dig' and burrowed themselves into our hearts. Maybe lemmings are suicidal after all.

Special thanks to Andrew Madsen of Lemmings Universe (www.lemmingsuniverse.net) for his help and assistance with photos and images. Also to Ian Barlow for his *Lemmings* skills and knowledge.

Where Time Stood Still

A lost world, four lost heroes and a game that was easy to get lost in; it can only be the Spectrum 128 classic Where Time Stood Still. Stuart Hunt speaks to Ally Noble and John Heap about Denton Designs' second great escape

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
- » **DEVELOPER:** DENTON DESIGNS
- » **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM 128
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

Although separated by narratives, it's impossible to discuss *Where Time Stood Still* without also mentioning its spiritual predecessor, *The Great Escape*. Transporting Spectrum owners from a German prison camp to an expansive lost world full of pigmies, dinosaurs and ancient temples, *Where Time Stood Still* was certainly an ambitious second project for Denton Designs' isometric engine, but one intrinsically linked to its prison-escape forerunner.

Owing to its atmospheric gameplay and detailed isometric visuals, *The Great Escape* was a huge hit for Denton. An unofficial movie licence, it took the title and escape premise of the classic 1963 film, and very little else. Its inventive gameplay saw players assume the role of a captured Allied soldier being held against his will inside a German prisoner of war camp in 1942, and saw players adhering to the repetitious trudge of prison life while snatching moments away from the gaze of the guards to find the correct items, plot their escape and kiss Auf Wiedersehen to the cyclic cog they find themselves turning inside the German war machine.

It was while working on *The Great Escape* that John Heap, *Where Time Stood Still*'s co-designer and programmer, came up with the next location to set Denton's isometric engine, finding inspiration from one of the most famous and popular literary worlds of all time.

"I started thinking of where I could take the external isometric mapping. One of the first games that I really got into was *The Hobbit* by Melbourne House, and I used to dream about doing a game that had similar scope and ambition," remembers John. "David Ward of Ocean suggested that my next product should be on the Speccy 128k, so I saw my chance! Luckily instead of attempting to model the whole of Middle-earth, I continued with both the 'Escape' and 'Old film' theme. It was still far too ambitious, many of my wiser colleagues just shaking their heads when looking at the world map spread across the office wall."

Where Time Stood Still is often mistaken for being a movie tie-in by many fans, but is actually more a genre tie-in. Its characters, story and visuals draw clear inspiration from classic adventure films about pulp fiction heroes discovering forgotten worlds, like *The Land That Time Forgot*, *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* and *Fantastic Voyage*, and their many lovable clichés.

"Those days I felt everything we coded was an experiment, everything was new"

"*WTSS* was an unapologetic amalgamation of almost every black and while film cliché," smiles John. "A rough-and-ready heroic pilot Jarret, Gloria the female lead who no doubt ends up in Jarret's arms should she survive being sacrificed to the gods. Her fiancé Dirk who's not strong but is awfully clever, and Gloria's wealthy, yet overweight, father. Being picked up by pterodactyls, grabbed by giant tentacles, being attacked by spear-throwing savages, and escaping via the back of a waterfall. Looking back I don't think there's an original idea in there, which was all part of the fun."

Working closely with John on *WTSS* was graphic artist Ally Noble. Ally was fundamental in helping create the authentic B-movie look of the game.

"I had a paperback movie poster book and the cover of that was influential, and helped with the 'look and feel," says Ally. "Looking at it now, the cover was a very *Lost*

LOST WORLD, LOST CONVERSION

OWING TO ITS scale and complexity, *Where Time Stood Still* only saw release on three computer platforms. It was also one of a small number of games to be written specifically for the ZX Spectrum 128. Curious as to whether any other conversions of the game were ever considered, or maybe started but then later canned, we had to put the question to John. "I did program an Amstrad version, but it wasn't released. There was a C64 version of *The Great Escape* but it was very slow. The C64's strength was in its hardware sprites and scrolling. The lowly 6502 processor found it difficult to handle software sprites and bitmaps. A C64 version of *WTSS* would have suffered from the same problems as in *The Great Escape*, only worse."



» [Spectrum] After their light plane malfunctions, Jarret, Gloria, Dirk and Clive crash in the Himalayas. They do discover a lost world though, so every cloud and all that.



> "Where Time Stood Still isn't your typical adventure game. Danger is omnipresent"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE GREAT ESCAPE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1987

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1985

scenario. Man and woman with ripped clothes stumbling from (light) aircraft wreck, with jungle and plateau in the background. It encapsulated the feel I imagined. I just had to get that across in pixels."

Ally and John began work on *WTSS* immediately after finishing *The Great Escape*. Going from one isometric adventure straight into another, there must have been specific aspects about *The Great Escape* fresh in John's mind that he wanted to develop and improve in *WTSS*?

"What I didn't learn was how long these games take, John responds. "*TGE* was well behind schedule by the time I finished, and *WTSS* was even more so. I wanted to improve the isometric projection to include hills. Not as easy as I thought. I also wanted to improve the AI of my characters. Give them personalities, make them act as if they had their own ideas about how things should be done. Those days I felt everything we coded was an experiment, everything was new. It was an exciting time, and the systems were simple enough to play with. Even the menus in *WTSS*, which could be expanded and moved around, were a little Apple Lisa-esque."

The character AI was certainly one of the more impressive aspects about the game. For the benefit of those who have never played it, the setup saw players having to lead four plane crash survivors to safety. Crash landing in a remote part of the Himalayas, the party discovers it has found an untouched land loaded with perils and creatures from a time long past and must now find a way to escape.

As John mentioned, the characters in the game were all cinematic stereotypes, and, during their treacherous expedition to a mountain pass, would become tired, scared, thirsty and hungry. Keeping them alive didn't just require leading them on the right path and protecting them from dangers, but also consideration of their dispositions and moods – feeding them when they became hungry or resting if they felt tired. It was an aspect that set *WTSS* apart from *The Great Escape*, and an area John was particularly fascinated by.

"Right from my first published game, *Alien*, I've been interested in creating personality-based characters," says John. "They do not react immediately to your every whim – they are not automatons, but you need to nurture them. Even in *Shadowfire* and *Enigmaforce*, my characters would run away if they were being outgunned. I admit your companions could be a pain to handle, say when leading them through the swamps. But if they really wound you up you could always shoot 'em."

"I remember having discussions about characters in books and people we had met that had similar personalities to the characters we had designed," adds Ally, when explaining to us how she and John came up with the individual characters. The names came from those discussions, as an extension of the personality we had imagined for each character."

Keeping everyone alive was integral to the survival mission. Learned Dirk, for example, was a linguist, and able to interpret the native language of the pigmy tribes in the game. Without him, the native's speech is complete gibberish and deciphering one of the main puzzles is made very difficult without relying on simple trial and error. But losing a member of your expedition not only affected the chance for survival, but also impacted on the spirits of the other characters too. And with danger lurking round every corner, and death never far away, the game became very tense and atmospheric with you trying to keep everyone alive, sane and together.

For an example of how good the game was at pulling the rug from under you, if you're unlucky during the expedition a circling











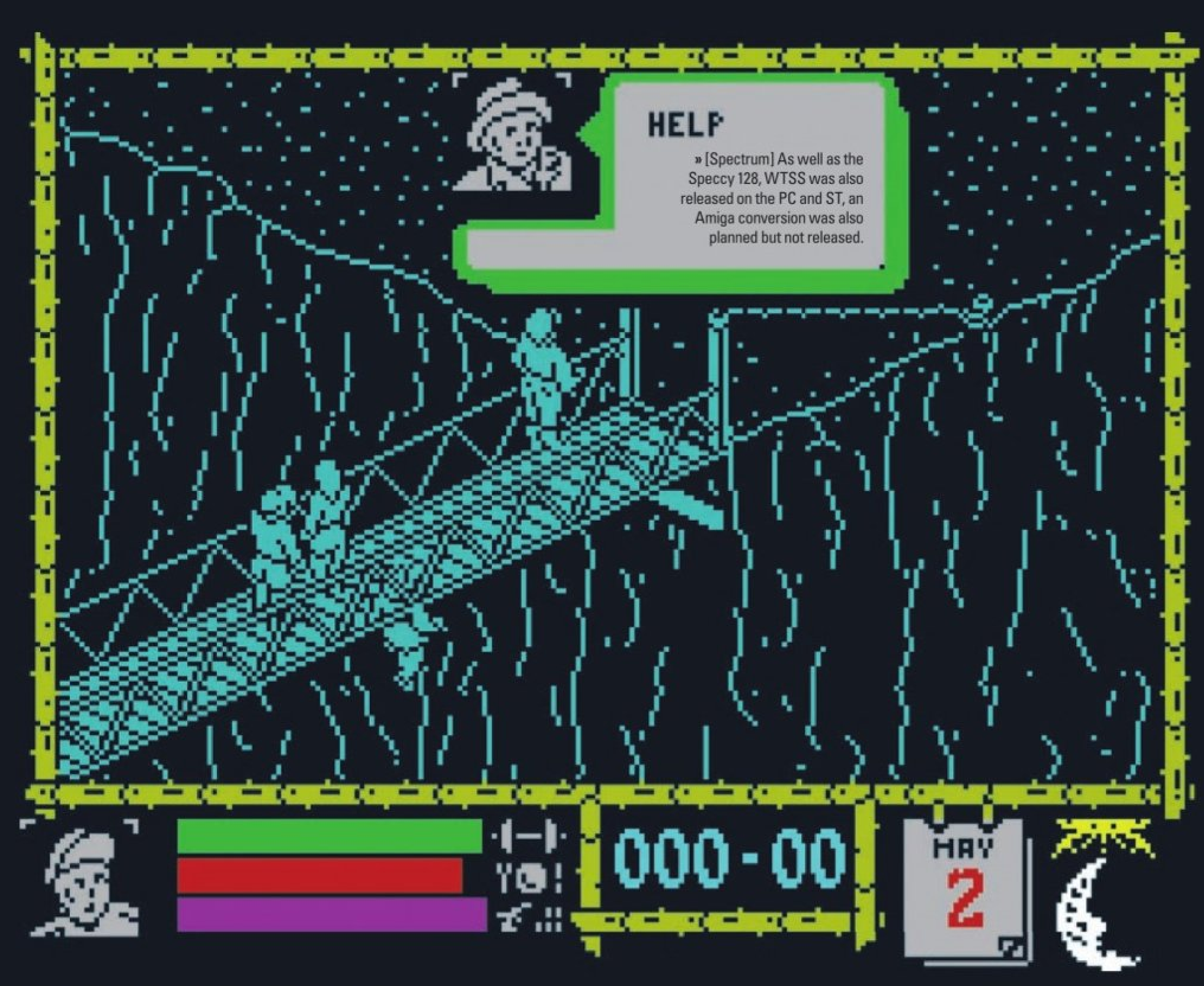
LOST WORLD, ALMOST LOST GAME BUG

THERE ARE OF course occasions in *WTSS* where it's fiendishly tricky to finish the game following the death of one your characters, but given the sheer scope of its game world and impressive AI, we're impressed *Where Time Stood Still* wasn't buggy – as most sandbox games of recent generations appear to be. That said, there is one bug in the game that John revealed to us, and, unless we're mistaken, it's one that's has managed to remain undiscovered, that is until now. It's a corker too.

"The joystick control of all the actors did create a good bug. At the beginning of the game, near the plane wreck, you can climb up a small ledge and jump off. The jump causes the hero to stray a little from the centre of the screen. Continue this operation, and it's possible to take the hero completely off the screen. The program will then remove it from on-screen processing, and leave its data structure available for the next actor to appear. As luck would have it, it's a Pterodactyl; you are given joystick control and can fly the reptile over the whole world!"



» [Spectrum] The environment is truly staggering. Including an ancient temple, forests, swamps and an impressive waterfall.



» [Spectrum] As well as the Speccy 128, WTSS was also released on the PC and ST, an Amiga conversion was also planned but not released.







» [Spectrum] Don't touch the controls and the characters will start resting, replenishing their strength for the journey ahead.



pterodactyl will randomly swoop down, ensnare one of your characters and carry them off into the air – eventually dropping their body somewhere random on the map, or sometimes into oblivion (but not before emptying their pockets of items). Realising that this was an unforeseeable tragedy, you start to discover that *Where Time Stood Still* isn't your typical adventure game. Danger is omnipresent.

Given how believable the actions and behaviour of the characters felt, just how big and easy a job was it writing and nailing the computer AI for what was unarguably the most ambitious adventure game of its day?

"Even in a closed world, (which *WTSS* is compared to the game worlds of today), one cannot code for every possible circumstance," answers John. "Perhaps confirming the movie roots to the game, I term every moving character, be it a squid, or a hero, as an actor, and actors are stored in a cast. Each actor was designed to react to standard joystick input values. The AI was basically a small set of rules that would feed the required joystick values into the actor, and it would move, attack, drop, pick up etc. This rule set needed to be sufficient so that a player character could navigate across mountains, swamps, rivers etc under their own steam, and defend themselves. It's not that difficult. Avoid water, big drops, and upon a collision (say bumping into a rock), turn right for a little way and then try again. The rule set was modulated by the presence of enemies and certain scenarios, which gave me the flexibility to override them when I needed."

While John had the task of trying to create characters that acted and reacted believably, it was Ally's job to assist in designing and drawing the immersive lost world for them to explore and escape.

From the art side it was always an issue of scale, making the player believe in a much bigger world than really existed in background character sets or block sets. This was achieved by having character sets that were really quite bland and reusable, then having very identifiable places like the huts.", answers Ally, when asked about the problems faced when designing the world. A big challenge was making the 'pencil' marks work in pixels to show the gradient of the rocky hills. I used character sets and block sets but also had to work with 'ranges', so inevitably repeated some characters that became 'out of range' of a particular block set.

While *Where Time Stood Still* is a game that knowingly wears its influences on its torn sleeves, it remains a landmark game. Perhaps due to being released on a small number of computers (Spectrum 128, Atari ST and PC), it seems to stand in the shadow of its more popular spiritual predecessor. Those who have played *WTSS*, though, know its game that is as rewarding as it is epic. Like all great adventure films, it's full of surprises, emotional scenes, memorable characters and great action set-piece moments. Sharing with us his fondest memory of the game, John gives us a great example of the game's unpredictable cinematic charm.

"The simple rule set that gave my actors their 'AI' can create quite complex behaviour that you couldn't possibly code. I remember late one night, when finalising the 'Gloria sacrifice' scenario. Gloria was within seconds of going off the ledge into the crevasse of doom, when a T-Rex turned up, at which point the savages turned around and started throwing their spears at it, Gloria just turned around, walked off the ledge and escaped. I didn't know that would happen, and to this day I find that strangely exciting."

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

- **Featured System:** PlayStation 2
- **Year Released:** 2007
- **Publisher:** Capcom
- **Developer:** Clover Studio
- **Key People:** Shinji Mikami (Director) Atsushi Inaba (Producer) Masafumi Takada (Sound Director and Score Composer)
- **Buy it for:** £10+

GO DEEPER

- **There's a racing Chihuahua in *God Hand* called Mikami's head – a reference to the director's comments on Gamecube exclusivity.**



» [PlayStation 2] There are no extra points for kneeing someone in the nads, but it is amusing nonetheless.

05. GOD HAND

Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami cut loose with God Hand, the charmingly bizarre beat-'em-up made only for the hardcore. The small audience that found it were very lucky…

THE BACKGROUND

When a world-renowned game designer – one whose last project is widely credited as one of the greatest titles ever created – steps outside of his comfort zone to make a 3D update of the side-scrolling beat-'em-up, the results of that kind of stylistic switch are always going to be fascinating. Shinji Mikami, the creator of Resident Evil who reinvented the franchise (and the third-person shooter) with its fourth instalment, next directed something that couldn't be further removed from survival horror.

God Hand was a beat-'em-up put together by the Capcom veterans at subsidiary Clover Studio, which became notorious due to its much-loved but poor-selling softography. Rather than making it straight-faced as convention usually dictates, though, Mikami opted to lace the cut-scenes, combos and setting of the game with a freakish array of funny touches, ranging from Quick-Time Event arse spankings to a poison Chihuahua. The title turned out to be a commercial bomb and Clover was shut just months after its release. From that gesture of closing a studio whose very name was a portmanteau of 'Creativity Lover', Capcom veered towards the often flavourless pro-Western design philosophies that dog its current output. The spirit of Clover Studio lives on in Platinum Games, of course, yet it's unlikely anything as bizarre or brave as *God Hand* will ever emerge again. It was a product of its time and the experimental mindset of its creator.

THE GAME

God Hand is more than just a side-scrolling beat-'em-up – it's an invisible RPG; one of the most customisable action experiences released on a mainstream console. A lot of this is easy to miss upon first putting the game on, yet anyone who sticks with it and explores the content outside of the levels will discover that there are in fact hundreds of entertaining and energetic combinations.

The game's most ingenious stroke isn't immediately obvious: the combos in *God Hand* are

Things of note







The great divider

God Hand didn't get the universal acclaim that it deserved, with mixed reviews from critics. Popular site IGN slated the game with a 3.0/10 score, before later naming it one of the 100 Greatest PS2 Games.

Looks aren't everything

The environments are mostly boxed-out regions of wasteland, yet there's something about the see-through walls that seems intentional, as if the designers accepted that these details weren't the point of the experience.

Once more with feeling

God Hand's humour even extends to its closing credits, an original song with suitably nonsensical lyrics, most notably "Dragon Kick your ass into the Milky Way!" It's a winning way to cap off a game as barmy as this.

Any regrets?

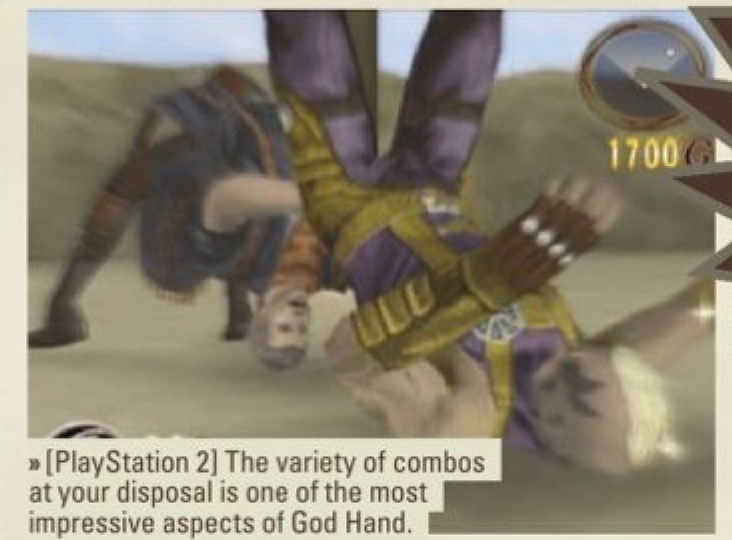
Mikami admitted that the game existed because of his reputation at Capcom. "I've released a lot of titles before and I feel that, perhaps specifically with regard to *God Hand*, I was given too much freedom."

Greatest trailer ever

God Hand's trailer was a gambit by Capcom, sending up how difficult it was. Gameplay footage cut to images of the enemies dancing, while odd messages like "a ball-bustingly hard game" whizzed by.



» [PlayStation 2] Projectiles are dotted around the environment, such as random explosive barrels.



» [PlayStation 2] The variety of combos at your disposal is one of the most impressive aspects of God Hand.

What the press thought



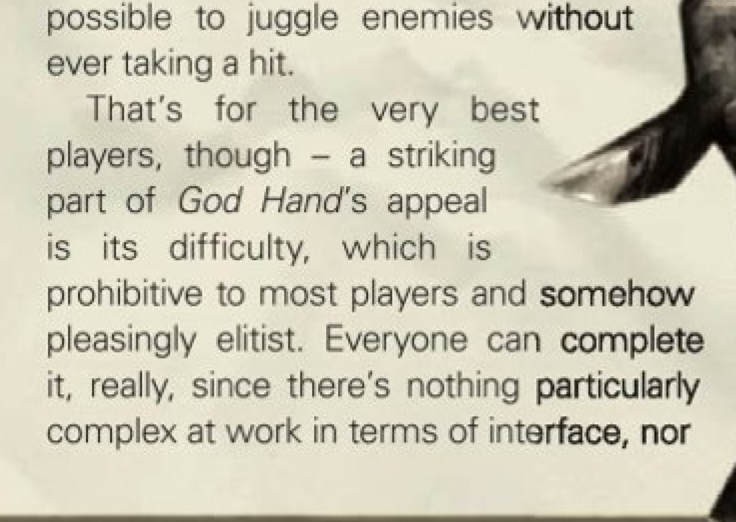
Play
Score: 89%
"The battles stay fresh and the cast are odd enough to keep you interested without resorting to cliches."



games™
Score: 6/10
"It's near impossible to recommend to any but the most hardcore of player or fan of the genre."

entirely customisable. Every button command can be adjusted to your liking, so if you want your basic square combo to be composed entirely of power moves or karate chops, it can be. Using this system, players can adapt to the challenging mechanics of the game in any way they see fit, as new moves are dotted around the game world and can be purchased in between levels. The idea that the entire pace of the fighting can be adjusted completely on the fly is what made *God Hand* such a revelation to hardcore players – no game of this genre has ever been so ambitious in the way it opens up its mechanics, while hours upon hours can be wasted in tweaking the system perfectly. It's possible to juggle enemies without ever taking a hit.

That's for the very best players, though – a striking part of *God Hand*'s appeal is its difficulty, which is prohibitive to most players and somehow pleasingly elitist. Everyone can complete it, really, since there's nothing particularly complex at work in terms of interface, nor does anything require grinding to level-up. When those enemies hit, though, they hit bloody hard. Even on Easy, *God Hand* is punishing.



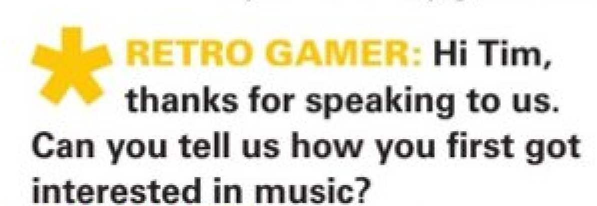
But you endure it. Why? Well, the story is utterly bonkers and it's hard not to be sucked into its whirlwind of unbridled lunacy, from boss fights with the large, chain-smoking maniac Elvis or a stand-off with the inexplicable Power Rangers parody group the 'Mad Midget Five' (the game's words, not ours). There's a sense that a lot of the humour comes from the translation, yet a lot of it is also intentional – none of Mikami's games have ever translated like this. There's a buoyant rawness to the tone of *God Hand*, as if the designers didn't worry about anything but giving everyone who plays it a silly, great time.

There's also an entire economy sub-game hidden away, as well. Hitting the casino in the breaks between areas lets players gamble their precious gold away. Simply put, there's so much game in *God Hand* that it's almost overstuffed – but it's really easy to manage and a lot of it is tucked away beneath the funny cut-scenes and bullock-smashing attacks. There's no better tribute to the hardcore gamer on the PlayStation 2.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

There was nothing like *God Hand* before and there never will be anything like it again – the mixture of humour and the depth of its combat made it among those few games that marked Capcom at the pinnacle of its creative power, alongside *Devil May Cry 3*, *Okami* and *Resident Evil 4*. *God Hand* was, in some ways, a throwback, yet it had enough depth to feel contemporary and generous helpings of leftfield humour to ensure it left a mark on the audience that found it. The timing of its release led many to conclude that the game sealed Clover's fate. If, indeed, *God Hand* was partly responsible for the demise of one of the most exciting studios to ever emerge out of Japan, at the very least Mikami and company went out fighting.





TIM WRIGHT

Tim Wright has been in and around the games industry for over 20 years. Creator of the sublime soundtrack to the Psygnosis classic WipEout, he helped define the sound of a generation of gaming. Martin Hinson caught up with the king of techno beats to discuss the career of a gaming musician

AFTER SPENDING HOURS as a child fiddling with a 'whirly', it was clear that Tim Wright had musical talent. Moving onto the piano at the age of five, Tim spent time adapting famous tunes before taking lessons at age seven. Throughout his teens Tim experienced band life, then studied Electronics and Communications Engineering for two years after completing his A-levels. In 1989 he penned the music for *Puggs In Space* on the Amiga, a public domain demo that caught the eye of Psygnosis...



RETRO GAMER: Hi Tim, thanks for speaking to us. Can you tell us how you first got interested in music?

TIM WRIGHT: My earliest recollection of being interested in music was my fascination with the whistling harmonics generated by a Whirly – a corrugated plastic tube about a metre long. You spin it around your head at different speeds to create different notes. They were intended to be simple toys, but as a child I'd happily spend the best part of an hour trying to get a good melody from one.

At around five or six years old I moved on to the piano. Not in any great capacity, but I did realise that I could listen to a song and then re-create it on my Grandmother's old upright. This led to badgering my parents for a piano, and, in agreement to attending lessons, they caved in and got one. I still have it downstairs in my dining room… It's a Kemble upright from around 1974.

Piano lessons were a bittersweet experience. I loved playing and learning new techniques, but I wasn't so keen on learning old musical scores and taking exams; I wanted to write my own music. I tried playing some of my compositions to my piano teacher and he would tell me how they weren't really a patch on what I was supposed to be learning. I just thought he was a bit nostalgic and didn't understand what I was trying to do. Looking back now, I think he had a point!

RG: What brought you to the games industry? Was it always something you wanted to get into?

TW: I started my love affair with computing back in my early teens. My next door neighbour was a programmer and one day he gave me a few old copies of *Practical Computing*. I'd always been a sci-fi fan and, as far as I was concerned, these magazines were an Aladdin's cave of electronic components and crazy software packages that wouldn't have looked out of place on a sci-fi film set. From that point on I knew I wanted to work with computers.

When I started secondary school, the only computers we had access to were the size of wardrobes, and they lived in a college 20 miles away. We had to write our programs on programming sheets in pencil, and these would be hand-keyed onto punched cards. The output was posted back to us on green striped line-printer paper. The total turnaround time from writing a program to getting the printout could be up to a week, so you had to get it right! The operators keying your program in weren't going to correct any syntax errors for you either (actually they did sometimes because they knew we were schoolkids. They left notes telling us to be more careful next time!).

I was 13 before the school purchased their own Acorn Atom network. We were allowed an hour a week on these to develop our programming skills in BASIC.

By the time I was 15, the local authority built a dedicated computer room with around eight or nine BBC Microcomputers that were linked to a set of dual drives and a printer in the corner. When I first walked into that room, the smell of new carpet and shiny plastic computers was intoxicating. I can still remember that



SELECTED TIMELINE

- **Puggs In Space** 1989
- **Awesome** 1990
- **Carthage** 1990
- **Tentacle** 1990
- **The Killing Game Show [FMV Intro]** 1990
- **Lemmings** 1990
- **Shadow Of The Beast II** 1990
- **Armour-Geddon** 1990
- **Leander** 1991
- **Amnios** 1991
- **Powermonger** 1991
- **Lost Souls** 1991
- **Agony** 1992
- **Aquaventura** 1992
- **Sensible Soccer** 1992
- **Shadow Of The Beast III** 1992
- **Puggsy** 1993
- **Last Action Hero** 1993
- **Combat Air Patrol** 1993
- **Phoenix Rising** 1993
- **Sensible Soccer** 1993
- **Mary Shelley's Frankenstein / Bram Stoker's Dracula** 1994
- **Microcosm** 1994
- **No Escape** 1994
- **Mickey Mania** 1994
- **Magician's Castle** 1994
- **The Misadventures Of Flink** 1995
- **WipEout** 1995
- **WipEout 2097** 1996
- **Krazy Ivan** 1996
- **Formula One** 1996
- **Adidas Power Soccer** 1996
- **Chomper** 1997
- **Monster Trucks** 1997
- **Lifeforce: Tenka** 1997
- **Colony Wars** 1997
- **Brainless** 1998
- **Music** 1998
- **Tellurian Defence** 1999
- **Music 2000** 1999
- **MTV Music Generator 2** 2001
- **Super Trucks** 2002
- **Pocket Music** 2002
- **Music 2002 Slinky Club Edition** 2002
- **Music 3000 /** 2003
- **Jet Set Willy Mobile** 2004
- **WipEout Pure** 2005
- **Ring Factory** 2005
- **Dance eJay 7** 2005
- **HipHop eJay 6** 2005
- **Techno eJay 5** 2006
- **R&B eJay 1** 2007
- **eJay Virtual Music Studio** 2007
- **Sudoku** 2007
- **TT Superbike Legends** 2008
- **Spellbound Party** 2009
- **Spellbound** 2009
- **Gravity Crash** 2009
- **Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing** 2010
- **Skillz** 2010

"I'm really proud to have achieved so much, and lucky to still be a part of the industry"



feeling as if it were yesterday. This room was where I first discovered computer games.

During class time we were writing BASIC programs, but in lunch hour the computing department was progressive enough to charge five pence a go for game-playing sessions. It was at one of these sessions that the head of computing department brought in a Commodore PET 2001 and dumped it in the corner of the room. I asked if it worked and he replied that it did, but that it wasn't "in keeping with the curriculum" and would therefore be skipped. I was horrified! I asked him could it stay so long as it earned its keep at lunchtimes as a games machine. "Games? On this!?" he replied.

The next day I showed my teacher a clone of *Space Invaders* running on it. "Where did you get that from?" he asked. "I wrote it." He didn't believe me, so I showed him the code and explained how it worked. He was quite pleased with my efforts and allowed the PET to stay. He did however decline to pay me a percentage from its lunchtime profits… I learned a valuable lesson about publishing deals there and then!

I learned assembly language on the C64 and I even created a few games and sold them at school. *Spider Chase* was one of my better attempts.

RG: You started working for Psygnosis, producing music for Amiga games. How did you find the pressure of working for such a successful company?

TW: I started on a freelance basis to begin with. It had already signed me up to assist in creating a game based on the *Puggs In Space* demo, and very soon after asked me to write the music for *Shadow Of The Beast II*. Apparently David Whittaker was too expensive so they thought they'd get someone else to do it for less money! This was my big

* MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

LEMMINGS



ONE OF TIM'S first projects at Psygnosis was *Lemmings*, in 1991. A game about trying to save little cute furry creatures from a rather messy death may seem a trifle difficult to score, but Tim was lucky in that Psygnosis had already kind of chosen the game's soundtrack for him.

Using a collection of famous scores and folk pieces that were hopefully out of copyright, Tim was asked to remix the classic tracks to suit the game's dramatic and colourful gameplay. The result was a brilliant and crazy score that managed to enhance the already tense gameplay, but then also inject it with even more humour as you wrestled with the various job types while trying to avoid steering your little lemmings into oblivion! Not every song was out of copyright, however…

SHADOW OF THE BEAST II



SHADOW OF THE Beast was a tough game to score. The original score, penned by David Whittaker, was among the greatest 16-bit computer soundtracks of its time. Tim was approached very late into *SOTB II*'s production to write the music but did a sterling job producing its score in limited time. He was given specific instructions from Martin Edmondson, co-founder of Reflections, on the sounds they wanted for the sequel. He followed this but also added a few instruments on top of ones used in the original, such as an electric guitar. This gave the music a slightly different feel, but it was received well by fans and has become a popular soundtrack of Tim's.

WIPEOUT



WIPEOUT WAS THE game that shot Tim into the big time. Launched in 1995 with the PSone, the soundtrack was making waves in the industry. Despite the licensed music from Leftfield and Orbital, many were keen to find out just who this musician calling himself Cold Storage was. Despite the quality of the licensed music, Tim's tracks stood out more than any of the others. Wonderfully crisp percussion and awesome futuristic synths suited the game perfectly. And being a CD-based game it allowed people to play Tim's music on standard CD players for the full effect. 'Messij' has gained a following with its huge bass line, pounding kick drum and ferocious pace.

MUSIC



MUSIC WAS SOMETHING different in console gaming. While rhythm-action games were gaining popularity, this was a full music creation package for the little 32-bit wonder. Released in 1998 to a very warm reception, it offered players a full mini studio with a 16-track sequencer with thousands of samples to create full blown tracks that even contained vocals, albeit dodgy ones! In 1999 *Music 2000* was launched, upped the sequencer to 24 channels and improved the interface tenfold. The series peaked on the PS2 with *MTV Music Generator 2*. Tim created the series with his new company Jester, it gained a cult following and is still used by composers today.

WIPEOUT HD



IT MAY SEEM a little cheeky to use a second *WipEout* game in a top five, but bear with us, we can explain its inclusion. After the success of *WipEout*, Tim was used less and less as the series went on in favour of big band names. In fact, *WipEout HD* contained no music by Tim at all. Due to this there was quite a large grumbling from long-term fans of the series, many feeling Tim's music gave the game real soul. In response to this, Tim created the album 'Cold Storage HD' as an unofficial soundtrack to the game. It was very well received with the fans and contained a track that was created for the original *WipEout*, but was unused at the time.



Tim was born in Wrexham in **1967**

Tim first discovered his musical talents at age **3**. Much to the delight of his parents!

60 is total number of games Tim has been directly involved with

6 is the total number of full solo albums that Tim has produced

4 is the number of years Tim spent at the dynamic Psygnosis

The longest track Tim's ever written is 'Tangerine'. It runs for **9** minutes and **31** seconds

In **1989** *Puggs In Space* was released in the public domain. It was Tim's first ever game soundtrack

*Shadow Of The Beast **II*** was Tim's big break with Psygnosis

Tim's fee for *Shadow Of The Beast II* was **£800**

Paid a bit more, Tim's fee for *Shadow Of The Beast III* was **£1,500**



» During his time at Jester, Tim worked as a salesman, marketer, web developer, PR officer and hardware technician.

break, so I wasn't really going to say no, was I? I have since apologised to David for undercutting him all those years ago. In fact, when I was at Jester Interactive I gave David a job as head of audio, so we got to know each other quite well and still stay in touch.

Having said all this, Psygnosis didn't pay me directly; I was left to haggle a price with the developer. I later found that the fee was extremely reasonable from their perspective. But, to be honest, I'd have done it for free at the time as I was so excited to be involved with such a high-profile title!

RG: *Shadow Of The Beast* was a huge success and featured a fantastic soundtrack from David. Did you feel any added pressure following such a strong OST and how did you go about creating the music for the sequels?

TW: The pressure was pretty immense. I listened to the music for *SOTB* and thought, 'Wow, that is good. This is not going to be easy…'. Martin Edmondson, the head honcho at Reflections, had very clear ideas about what sounds he wanted me to use, right down to synthesizer patch numbers! I think this was mostly because David Whittaker had used a Korg M1 in his soundtrack, and Martin, who coincidentally owned one, wanted continuity from *SOTB* to *SOTB II*.

Even with similar sounds, no two musicians will compose the same music. I certainly tried to go with a similar feel, but I think the addition of electric guitar elements gave *SOTB II* a fresh perspective. Both *SOTB II* and *III* seemed to be written at breakneck speed as I was brought in fairly late on both games. This meant early morning trips into Liverpool on a number of occasions, and several late night drives between the Wirral and North Wales to collect the audio play routine code developed by Lee, my brother.

As for *SOTB III*, that was more of a rush job than *SOTB II*. I recall Martin phoning me at home and asking if I'd do *SOTB III*. I agreed, but told him the fee was now £1,500. He asked why, and I said, "Well… *SOTB II* was my first gig, but I'm working on lots of projects now and I'm getting much better rates." He reluctantly agreed. At the time I really had no idea if I'd quoted a good price or not, and I had fibbed a bit about 'lots of projects', but I was pleased that my worth had increased and that I was still working on cutting-edge titles.

Musically speaking, *SOTB III* was a departure from *SOTB II*'s pan flutes and guitars. I went more electronic and piano-based, and at the time I remember thinking it wasn't as good as *SOTB II*. With hindsight I think I was a little harsh, probably due to the deadlines. I think the game over and game complete themes in *SOTB III* are a lot stronger than those in *SOTB II*.

RG: The soundtrack to *Lemmings* was a big hit. Can you tell us about the work you did on *Lemmings* in reworking Brian Johnston's work?

TW: *Lemmings* was a firefighting project. I got a call from Steve Riding, a producer at Psygnosis, asking me if I could help them with a problem. They had just received a build of *Lemmings* and much of the music was covers of famous tunes, for example the theme from *Batman*. I was tasked with creating around 14 new tunes that should be jaunty versions of well-known folk tunes, or remixes of music from other Psygnosis games. Basically, anything that wasn't going to land them in hot water.

Aside from the tight deadline, there were other restrictions too. We could have about 400KB or so for instrument sounds, but all the songs had to share samples. We could only use three channels with one spare for sound effects and I had to use a custom music tracker program called Linel Tracker if I remember rightly. I was used to using a tracker program with lots of effects and plenty of control over the song, like Ultimate SoundTracker, but this one was awful. In the end, many of the *Lemmings* tunes I composed were original themes, but some took snippets from classical works and folk songs which I embellished, probably to the horror of the original composers!

A few years later, after *Lemmings* had shipped millions of copies on




» Tim describes the moment he understood the *WipEout* soundtrack as 'like an epiphany'. This is not that moment.

umpteen platforms, Psygnosis was contacted by the copyright holder of 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' aggrieved at not getting any royalties for the use of their melody in one of my tracks. Yes… the one thing I was told to avoid I fell foul of, and by the time this happened I was actually employed by Psygnosis too, so I was quite worried how they would take it. Thankfully, Ian Hetherington was fine about it, and they ended up paying a modest fee for its use. Ironically, the song fell out of copyright a few years later!

RG: How did you find the move from the Amiga to the PlayStation? Did you enjoy the relative freedom of more CD-based audio or was the challenge of computer music more enjoyable?

TW: At the time I think I was just excited to be finally writing 'proper' music. No more chip tunes, no more piddling about with RAM and no more polyphony in single digits. The truth wasn't always in line with that, of course. On a lot of occasions the CD drive was used to spool level data or graphical content, so I found myself writing MOD files again, albeit with more RAM, more channels and even some real-time effects. Even when I could have CD audio, the CD got very full very quickly, so it would be encoded in a compressed format at a reduced bitrate.

The biggest upside was that Psygnosis's in-house audio department had to be upgraded to keep up with the technology. The only thing I kept from the 'good old days' was my Amiga 1200 computer as MIDI-based sequencer running Bars and Pipes. I had a purpose-built sound-proofed studio with custom racking and a selection of pro-audio synthesizers and samplers. Definitely a case of 'kid in a sweet shop' when I was deciding what equipment to get!

RG: Your work on *WipEout* has earned you a lot of fans. How did you go about creating the soundtrack? It was very different to anything you had done prior…

TW: When I was asked to create the music for *WipEout* I thought it would be a breeze. They wanted electronic, fast-paced music, so I thought 'I'll just do Jean Michel Jarre at 140BPM and Bob's your uncle!'. It was very naive and ultimately an incorrect assumption, as I quickly found out.



The team were looking for something more along the lines of The Prodigy meets ambient trance, and I had no experience writing in either style. My first few attempts were more industrial grunge than fast-paced flyer action, partly because I'd just finished writing in that style of *Krazy Ivan*.

In desperation I was dragged out to a club to experience the kind of music they wanted first hand. At first I couldn't fathom why anyone would want to stand in a club listening to tracks that seemed to go on forever with only slight changes here and there, and the occasional breakdown. But after an hour or so I got it… it was like an epiphany! It's only when you're on the dance floor with the bass pounding that you truly get 'into' the music and completely understand it.

Having said that, the *WipEout* tracks ended up being a homogenisation of trance, dance and Eighties synth leadlines. I recall one of the graphic artists telling me that in each *WipEout* track there was enough material for at least three or four standard trance tracks.

RG: After the success of titles like *WipEout*, we saw an increase of licensed music and less reliance of professional videogame musicians. How do you think this has affected the industry as a whole?

TW: At first, very few established acts wanted to put their name to games. It wasn't seen as cool. But after *WipEout* and other similar titles hit the shelves, gaming became more trendy and acceptable, and so the floodgates opened. It didn't immediately impact on jobs. Sound effects still needed to be created, someone had to convert the music for use in-game and there were myriad other housekeeping tasks to be done on the audio side.

> “Many people bought a PlayStation just to use Music, so that was quite a buzz”

In the Eighties and early Nineties game musicians were part composer, part programmer, and had to do a lot of self-management. However, as time went by the job of the in-house musician got split into separate disciplines: SFX artist, audio programmer and musician, with the latter role diminishing internally.

These days I think it's safe to say that the bulk of videogame musicians are freelancers, who bolster their portfolio by working on general audio projects too.

RG: What spurred you on to produce the excellent *Music* series for the PlayStation?

TW: Initially it was the need for a quick product that could be created by a small team, but largely it was a desire to put music creation into the hands of the masses for a fraction of the cost of a synthesizer and a MIDI software package.

When I was in my teens, the nearest you could get to writing music on a budget was using a C64, and that wasn't really going to win any music awards. Anything more progressive involved a multi-track tape recorder and they were very expensive. So when I designed *Music* for PSone, I wanted to give kids the power to be creative at a level that approached a good quality music demo, something they could tout to record labels and say, 'Go on, give me a chance…'

What amazed me was that it wasn't just the younger generation who got into the products. We received letters from blokes in their forties and fifties who had rediscovered a love of writing music because they already had a PlayStation in the house, and for a few extra quid they could have a small recording studio in their lounge or bedroom. Many people bought a PlayStation just to use *Music*, so that was quite a buzz.

RG: Were there any fears setting up Jester to release a niche product?

TW: We were pretty gung-ho about it. The money we used to set up Jester Interactive was out of a business software company called Morgan Computing, and I was told it would largely have gone to the taxman in any case, so there were still some risks, not least of which we could all be out of a job if it failed, but we all thought it was worth a punt. The idea of *Music* being just a sequencer wasn't the initial plan, though. We played around with ideas of having some gaming elements, or disguising the fact that it was a sequencer with environments, like a

musical playground or a kitchen, but we decided those ideas were intrinsically at odds with what we were really trying to do. As luck would have it, Sony was quite receptive to the idea, so the timing was perfect.

RG: How come we never saw a *Music* title for PS3/Xbox 360?
TW: The reasons are many. After *Music 3000* for PS2, Jester veered away from music games to concentrate on racing titles. Codemasters produced one last product in *MTV Music Generator 3* before giving up on music products too. By this point in time there were quite a few music products out there, and they are by their very nature quite evergreen, so the market became saturated. I have been approached with the intention of reviving the brand or developing something new for the current range of consoles, so we'll have to see if that comes to fruition!

RG: In 2003 you set up a company called Tantrumedia. What services does it provide and what made you set up such a company?
TW: After Jester ramped down its music product development I wanted to move on and do my own thing. In helping build Jester up to a 50-man outfit I'd had to wear many hats: salesman, marketer, web developer, public relations officer and hardware technician. All this coupled with my experiences at Psygnosis meant I had a pretty good insight into the many facets and mechanisms of running a company and taking products to market. I wanted to harness all of that knowledge, so I decided to set up a multimedia company that could cater for pretty much any need, either directly or by bringing in key people that I knew could do the job, because you meet a lot of very talented and capable people as you go along.

Some said it would never work, but Tantrumedia is still going and we've worked on some really fun projects, from website design and hosting on our dedicated server through to developing the *eJay* music software range, printing business cards for large games developers and scoring for film, television and videogames.

RG: You have several albums of your own. How do you approach the making of an album that has no ties to videogames?
TW: All my albums have a theme, and I think that's the key. When you're writing an OST for a game, you have the graphics and the concept to work with, not to mention the team as a sounding board for ideas and feedback. When I'm creating a standalone audio album it generally grows from the seed of an idea or a musical challenge I set myself.



» Tim's music production career had fairly humble beginnings.

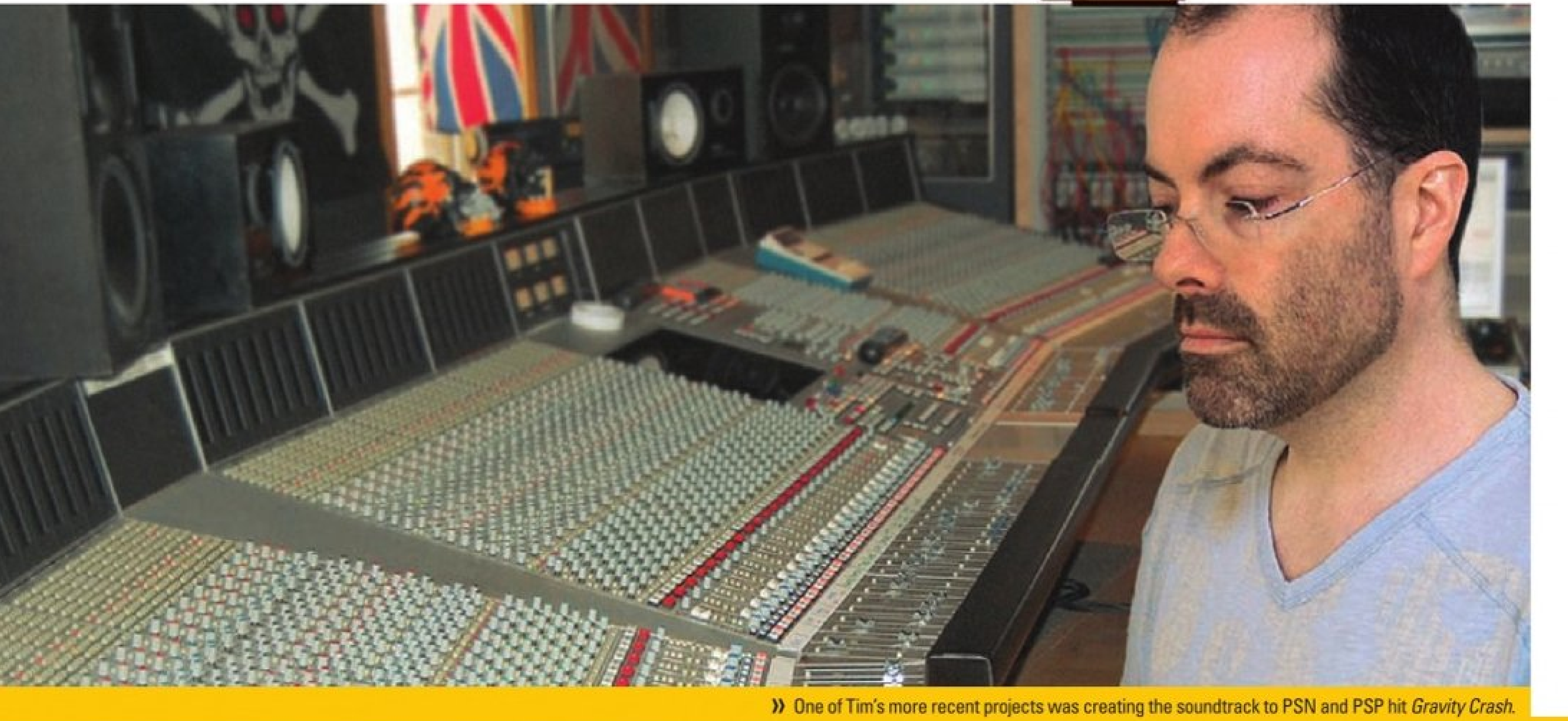
RG: Are you a keen gamer? Retro or modern?
TW: I tend to go in fits and starts. I got utterly addicted to *World Of Warcraft*. Before that it was *Quake*, *UFO: Enemy Unknown* and *Doom*. Last week I picked up *World Of Goo* again and played that to death. The one that really got me hooked last year was the PSP's *Warhammer 40,000 Squad Command*. I played it every night in bed, much to my wife's annoyance I'm sure!

I have a large collection of 8 and 16-bit microcomputers, and early consoles that I like to fire up now and again with some favourite games I just have to play when I do: *Castle Quest* on the BBC Micro, *Quo Vadis*, *Elite* and loads of others on the C64, *Grid Runner* and *Lunar Lander* on the VIC20 and *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* on the Atari VCS to name but a few.

RG: Finally, how does it feel to have such a huge influence on people who have taken to music?
TW: To play even a small part in helping people achieve their goals or have some memorable fun is something you can't put a value on. I've had many wonderful emails from people telling me how much they've enjoyed either the music I've written, or the products I've designed.

Some of those letters are really heartfelt and humbling. One person told me how they'd considered taking their own life because they were so depressed and felt they had failed in everything they'd tried. They got hold of *Music 2000* and started writing their way out of depression. Things like that just really move you and you feel like you've achieved much more than you could ever have imagined possible when you started developing the product.

Music is such a personal thing. It touches lives in unfathomable and myriad ways, and is powerful enough to change how people think feel and act towards each other. I'm really proud to have achieved so much, and lucky to still be a part of the industry. But, of course, none of it would have been possible without the support of family, friends and work colleagues who all helped make it happen in one way or another.


» One of Tim's more recent projects was creating the soundtrack to PSN and PSP hit *Gravity Crash*.





Super Chase HQ

BEFORE BURNOUT, WE HAD THIS…

RETROREVIVAL

C.G

» SNES
» TAITO CORPORATION
» 1993

The original *Chase HQ*'s team hit upon a masterstroke when the game was being designed. Instead of just enabling the player to drive like a nutter – see: almost every other arcade racing game up until that point – it tasked them with driving like a nutter and ramming a foe to a standstill. Therefore, it combined the average gamer's twin passions of his need for speed with the need for smashing things into tiny pieces. Result: instant classic.

For some reason, few subsequent games of the era jumped aboard that particular bandwagon, and even *Chase HQ*'s own arcade sequel switched the satisfyingly tactile 'ramming a car to a halt' with 'shooting at the bad guys from a distance'. However, Taito's SNES sequel, *Super Chase HQ*, brought home the magic of the original, combining it with a few aspects of its sequel, and the result is a thrilling retro arcade racer, with plenty going for it.

The game uses the original *Chase HQ* as its template – your weapon is your car, and your aim is to weave through traffic, catch up to the bad guy, and ram his car until it bursts into flames, scuppering his plans and probably ensuring that his vehicle won't pass its next MOT. Rather unfairly, though, some of the bad guys are armed to the teeth: biker gangs shoot through your windscreen; a truck has what looks to be a perfectly innocent boombox in the trunk, but no, it's only a bloody rocket launcher; and the guy in the final level gets assistance from his heavily armed chum with a helicopter. Nice.

In these days of high-octane pile-ups in the *Burnout* and *Need For Speed* series and car-jacking aplenty in *Grand Theft Auto XII: The Police Won't Be Crowing About A Drop In Car Crime Figures This Year*, *Super Chase HQ* looks simplistic and feels a little quaint. Although, truth be told, the graphics are rather lovely: the view area's smallish, but the environments are vibrant and nicely drawn, with light and weather conditions that change as you belt along. But when you're zooming down the freeway at the behest of Nancy, you won't care. *

RETRORATED



>> Yes, most of the titles over the following pages came out before Christmas, but look at it like this: some of them are bound to have dropped in price by now, so this now becomes a handy guide to how to spend that leftover Christmas money

>> SONIC COLOURS

Wii

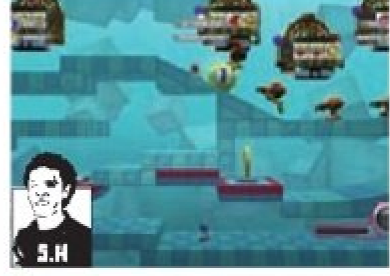
retro GAMER SIZZLER

» [Wii] *Sonic Colours* is a jaw-droppingly beautiful game. We guarantee that many cynics will say the following: 'That looks really good… for a Wii game.' Idiots.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit
An astoundingly good racer that I'm finding impossible to put down. It's amazing online.



STUART
Sonic Colours
A fantastic *Sonic* game that does the series proud. I can't get enough of the DS version.



DAVID
Prince Of Persia Trilogy
I'm a big fan of the franchise, so I relish the chance to go through the PS2 games again.

INFORMATION

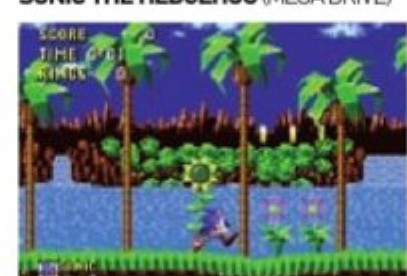
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** DS
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» It took one 16-bit videogame to turn Sonic into one of the world's most recognisable videogame heroes. While his 2D adventures were always rated highly, his move to 3D left a lot to be desired, with most of his outings failing to recapture the brilliance of the early Mega Drive games.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (MEGA DRIVE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
SONIC 4: EPISODE I (XBLA)



Sonic Colours

AT LAST, THE SONIC CYCLE IS OFFICIALLY BROKEN



It's taken Sega many, many years, but it's finally created a 3D *Sonic* game that recaptures the brilliance of the Mega Drive years.

While past titles like *Sonic Rush* and the recently released *Sonic 4* have all made impressive moves in the right direction, it's *Sonic Colours* that reveals new hope for Sega's mascot. Like the Mega Drive games of old, *Sonic Colours* absolutely nails the combination of exploration and out-and-out speed that served them so well, and while it's never going to replace *Sonic 2* as our favourite in the series, it's making us seriously question where we'd place the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Sonic 3* in a top five *Sonic* games now.

Of course, a 3D *Sonic* game wouldn't be a 3D *Sonic* game without a new gimmick, but unlike previous ones, the addition of the Wisps actually works, and the different coloured sprites actually improve the gameplay rather than hinder it. The Wisps are strange little aliens that imbue Sonic with special powers when he activates them, which are all annoyingly enabled by shaking the Wii Remote.

Yellow Wisps let you drill into the ground, crucial for discovering new rings or quicker





» [Wii] The two-player mode in *Colours* is a nice idea, but it's rather sloppily executed and not too much fun as a result.



» [Wii] The colourful Wisps make a massive difference to how you tackle each level.

routes through a stage; Pink Wisps give Sonic stronger spikes that enable him to stick to any surface; and Green Wisps let Sonic fly through the air for a limited amount of time. There are plenty more to discover with abilities that range from giving you a short burst of speed to letting you switch blue blocks and rings, but unlike previous additions to the series, they all genuinely add to the overall experience.

The Wisps also provide the focus for *Sonic Colours*' story, which has Dr Robotnik capturing the poor aliens to fuel his intergalactic theme park. Unlike previous stories, it's often smart and self-referential and shows a lighter, jokey side to Sonic Team. It even features half-decent voice acting – a first for the series.

And yet, for all of *Sonic Colours*' improved gimmicks and bearable story, it's the gameplay that works so well, and Sonic Team has more or less replicated the original magic that made the Mega Drive games such a joy to play through. *Sonic 4* did a good job of capturing the stylish level design of old, but *Sonic Colours* well and truly nails it. The vast majority of the 60-odd stages are meticulously designed, some being completed in a few minutes; others requiring a fair amount of exploration before you reach their ends. A couple of stages towards the game's end feel a little rushed, as if Sonic Team started running out of ideas, but these are the exception rather than the rule, and for the most part the slick design and genuinely enjoyable gameplay will have you thanking the stars that you never gave up on Sega's mascot.

Sonic has always had a decent run on the Wii, but Sonic Team has outdone itself here. Visually it's spectacular, with some truly amazing-looking environments that move along at a ridiculously hectic rate, and the levels are packed with variety. The Wisps enhance the already-enjoyable gameplay, while the story is genuinely worth sitting through. These are all things we never thought we'd ever say about a 3D *Sonic* game. Forget the 2006 *Sonic The Hedgehog*, forget *Sonic Unleashed* and forget *Sonic Heroes*. Sonic is back and he's never been better. It's certainly been worth all the wait and heartache.

OPINION

Sonic Colours proves that it's possible to create a 3D *Sonic* that captures the 16-bit spirit. It's fast, well-balanced, and you can even skip the cut-scenes. It's not perfect, but it's a massive improvement that sets a high standard for future *Sonic* games.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

Finally, a 3D outing that does the heritage of *Sonic The Hedgehog* justice. Yes, it's not quite perfect, but it's a glorious return to form that will cause even the most discerning of *Sonic* fans to leap for joy. Welcome back, Sonic.

>> Scores

Presentation	82%
Graphics	95%
Sound	82%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	91%
Overall	**90%**

✱ VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Another month and the Virtual Console once again crawls along, gasping for breath and seemingly unable to deliver more than a handful of games at a time. Maybe the recent release of *Super Mario All-Stars* will give Wii owners a taste for the classics again. We'll just have to wait and see.

Faxanadu
» **System:** NES
» **Points:** 500 Points
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Spin Master
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Points:** 900 Points
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

PC

It's another good month for Good Old Games, as it delivers the last part of its exclusive Hasbro/Atari/*Dungeons & Dragons* deal. *Baldur's Gate II* is being offered at an insanely good price, and it also features its expansions and plenty of other goodies for the asking price. It's going to be interesting to see what GOG does next.

Baldur's Gate II Complete
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» The run of classic *Dungeons & Dragons* games comes to an end, but what a way to go out. If you've never played this excellent sequel to *Baldur's Gate*, then there's never been a better time to discover it. A true classic in every sense of the word.

Chaser
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $5.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Moto Racer
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $5.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Space Rangers
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

After months and months of little to no activity, it would appear that someone at Sony has finally realised that the company is sitting on a host of classic PSone games. Now admittedly, it's not actually releasing anything decent – bar the astoundingly good *Grandia* – but this is a massive step in the right direction. More please, Sony.

40 Winks
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £3.19
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

All-Star Boxing
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

ATV Racers
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £2.39
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Critical Depth
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Grandia
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £6.29
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» Famed for its excellent combat system and well-scripted story, *Grandia* is an astonishingly good RPG that fans of the genre will lap up. The price is high compared to other PSone classics, but you're getting a hell of a lot of game for your money.

Gunship
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Miracle Space Race
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £2.39
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Sports Superbike 2
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £2.99
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Super Slammin' Dodgeball
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £3.19
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

GAME ROOM

Could it be that Game Room is getting ready to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of its rubbish Atari and Intellivision titles? Possibly, for Pack 13 revealed a surprisingly decent number of arcade games including *Sunset Riders* and *Detana Twinbee*. Here's hoping that Microsoft has found a worthy successor to Krome, capable of fulfilling the service's massive promise, and that the recent quality output continues.

* All games are 240 Points

Blades Of Steel
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

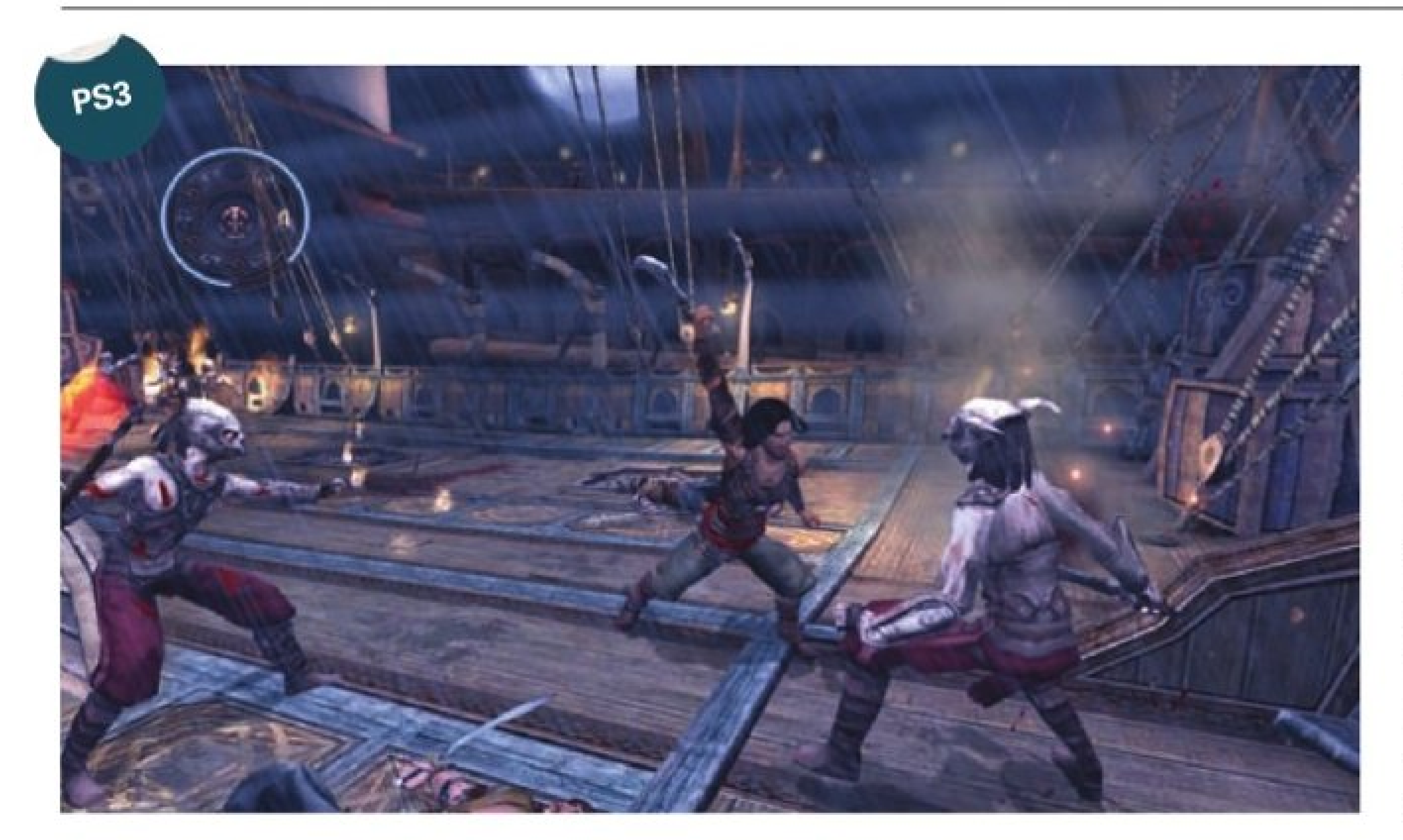
Slap Shot: Super Pro Hockey
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Pitfall II: Lost Caverns
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» Yes, it's another Atari 2600 game, but this is easily one of the better ones, with David Crane pulling out all the stops to deliver another slice of platforming genius.

Trick Trap
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Vectron
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Twinbee
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆





» [PS3] Artistically, the games look great. Technically? Not so much any more.

Prince Of Persia Trilogy

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTREAL » **PLAYERS:** 1



With HD remakes now all the rage, we decided to take a look at Ubisoft's first offering. Sadly for gamers, Ubisoft hasn't given the same attention to its *Prince Of Persia Trilogy* as Sony did with the excellent *God Of War Collection* and its incoming *Sly Racoon* update. Yes, there is stereoscopic 3D support, but the vast majority of users won't be able to access it, so you'll simply have to do with three straightforward ports that, while looking far better than their PS2 originals, don't appear to have the same high-def care given to them as Sony's offerings.

It's a good job, then, that this trilogy kicks off with one of the greatest platform adventures from the past decade. Yes, the combat is still as dull as ever, but the structure of *Sands Of Time* is simply wonderful, really showing off the enormity of the Prince's challenge. It's beautifully paced, still looks exceedingly pretty thanks to all its hazy style, and has some marvellous dialogue and banter between its leads.

It's something of a shame that its two sequels have never quite been able to scale the same dizzy heights, and this hasn't changed in the intervening years. While there are definitely improvements in the aesthetic fidelity across the sequels, the gameplay, which becomes far more combat-oriented, and the story never reaches the high standards set by the original. Save some cash and buy the standalone version of *Sands Of Time* from PSN instead.

OPINION

I was never impressed with the emo direction of the later *POP* games, so I don't fancy reliving them again now. *Sands Of Time*, though, is a fantastic adventure with one of the greatest videogame endings for quite some time. Get the digital version instead.

Darran Jones

>> Scores

Presentation	51%
Graphics	78%
Sound	80%
Playability	78%
Addictivity	73%
Overall	**78%**



Alien Breed 3: Descent

» **SYSTEM:** XBLA, PC
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Team17 wraps up** the final part of its *Alien Breed* trilogy with a strong effort that proves why the series remains so popular. It's far more atmospheric, offers a better range of weapons, and features tighter level design. Add in some decent boss encounters and some genuinely terrifying encounters and *Alien Breed 3*, while not quite capturing the heady heights of the Amiga games, rounds off the series with an impressive flourish.

>> Score **83%**



Gunstar Heroes

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **After a rather** large delay, Sega has released another Mega Drive title, and it's one of our favourites. Sadly, it's another disappointing port that suffers from slowdown and occasionally unresponsive controls. We've no problem with having virtual buttons over the playing area, but a game like *Gunstar Heroes* needs fast, responsive controls, and this port just can't manage it. It's becoming something of a cliché now, but as long as companies keep on releasing poor conversions, we'll keep warning you about them.

>> Score **58%**



Time Crisis: 2nd Strike

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **As much as** we enjoy the structure of this latest *Time Crisis* game, it just doesn't work very well on the iPhone. While we can forgive its easiness, things get harder because your finger will often inadvertently hide enemies, making you suffer from unnecessary deaths. It's a real shame, because the overall structure of the levels is genuinely quite good, and it looks ace on the iPhone's razor-sharp screen. It's just not a lot of fun to actually play.

>> Score **48%**



Chu Chu Rocket HD

» **SYSTEM:** IPAD
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **While we still** wait for sensible Sega to release this on Xbox Live Arcade, crazy Sega unleashes it on the iPad. The end result is a surprisingly faithful conversion that proves that the popular Dreamcast game is as addictive as ever and looks absolutely glorious to boot. It's disappointing, then, that while the controls do an acceptable job of transplanting the game to the touch screen, they aren't responsive enough to tackle the later stages with any degree of confidence. What a pity, but at least the puzzle modes still work well.

>> Score **71%**

PSN



Crazy Taxi

» **SYSTEM:** PSN, XBLA » **PRICE:** £7.99/800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Even though the** Offspring and Bad Religion are missing from the soundtrack, and you can't drive to Pizza Hut, it really doesn't matter. Even when this arcade hit is stripped down to its undies, Sega's game remains amazing fun, and while the pop-up and bland textures that were acceptable on our little old TVs are far more apparent in high-def-o-vision, the core gameplay remains as tight as a drum. Yes, there are niggles – the compression used on the audio makes all the speech and sound effects sound awful – but the inclusion of online leaderboards and the original city and Crazy Box ensure that this will last you just as long as the Dreamcast original. The Dreamcast is dead. Long live the Dreamcast.

>> Score **89%**

Splatterhouse

» **SYSTEM:** PS3, XBOX 360 » **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **When the biggest** draw of a new game is playing its unlockable originals, you know you're in trouble. Excessively gory and with an expletive count that would put Gordon Ramsay to shame, *Splatterhouse* starts off fun, but soon gets repetitive. The smart side-on homages to the old games are let down by woolly controls and poor design decisions, like how you have to restart boss battles if you miss one QTE and how most puzzles require you to do little more than dismember a set number of enemies. The nods to the old games are a nice touch, but the lacklustre combat and poor level design quickly begin to grate. A franchise best left in the past.

>> Score **50%**

PS3



PC

retro GAMER SIZZLER

Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit

» **SYSTEM:** PC, PS3, XBOX 360 » **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-8

>> **Good old Criterion.** After reinventing the arcade racer with the wonderful *Burnout Paradise*, the Guildford-based developer has given EA's *Need For Speed* franchise a fuel-injected kick up the behind. The end result is a staggeringly good cops and robbers racer that mixes elements of Taito's *Chase HQ* with the high-octane carnage of the *Burnout* franchise. Instantly accessible thanks to its arcade-styled front-end and simple gameplay mechanics, it nevertheless has massive longevity due to the 'one more go' appeal of the racers and the superb online interaction that Criterion has created. Blisteringly fast and with a constant stream of cars, stages and events to unlock, this is arcade racing at its very best and a massive turnaround for the ageing franchise.

>> Score **93%**

Bubble Bobble Double

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE » **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

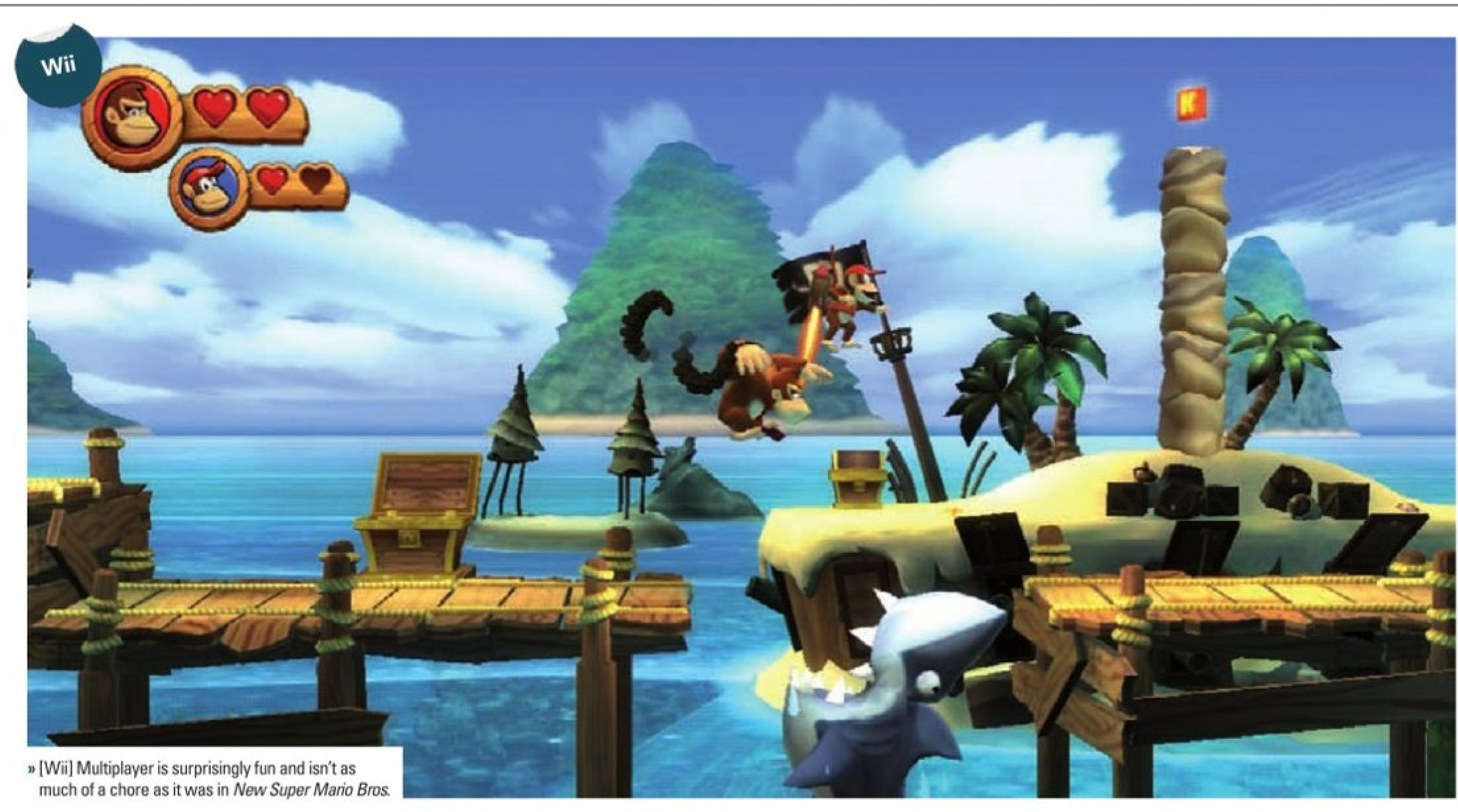
>> **It's always nice** to see developers take existing properties in new directions. *Bubble Bobble Double* is actually two games in one. The first is a nigh-on perfect conversion of the original arcade game, which is let down by some incredibly poor controls, while the latter is an interesting time attack effort. A static Bub sits in the middle of the screen and is approached by the game's famous enemies. Tapping one encases it in a bubble, while swiping said bubble into other trapped foes creates huge bonus chains. Add in the fact that destroyed enemies leave behind fruit that must be quickly collected and it becomes a frantic reaction test that is only let down by insane difficulty spikes.

>> Score **68%**

iPhone



>> DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS



» [Wii] Multiplayer is surprisingly fun and isn't as much of a chore as it was in *New Super Mario Bros.*

✱ GO DEEPER

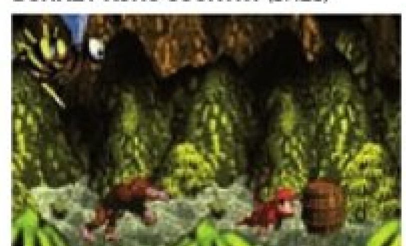
The facts behind Donkey Kong Country Returns

>> All three SNES *Donkey Kong Country* games are available for download on the Virtual Console.

>> *Donkey Kong Country*'s soundtrack was released on CD. Many of the tunes have been remixed for the Wii version.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY (SNES)

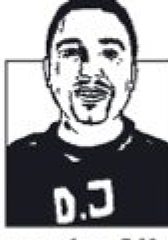


▽ SOMETHING NEW
NEW SUPER MARIO BROS (WII)



THE KING OF SWING IS BACK IN TOWN

Donkey Kong Country Returns



Who do you turn to when your most respected third-party developer is now batting for Microsoft? If you're Nintendo, you simply hand the reins of your classic franchises over to Retro Studios and reap the rewards.

After making the *Metroid* franchise relevant again, Retro Studios has now released a reboot of the popular *Donkey Kong* series, and crikey is it good. It's also perfect proof that the platform genre is alive and well and still perfectly viable.

Following a similar plot to the original SNES game, Donkey Kong is once again trying to reclaim his precious banana hoard. This time, though, the Kremlings are nowhere to be seen, as bad guy duties have been handed over to the mischievious Tikis, who are able to use mind control on many of the jungle's inhabitants.

» [Wii] Aesthetically, *Returns* is brilliant, with some stunning backgrounds and remixed tunes from the original SNES game.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** RETRO STUDIOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Donkey Kong Country* game appeared on the SNES and was released in 1994. Since then the popular franchise has spawned two additional sequels on the SNES, an N64 follow-up, and plenty of spin-off titles. Originally by Rare, development duties have now passed over to Retro Studios.

Unlike the original game, there is no tag team element to *Returns*, with Diddy simply riding on Donkey Kong's back and extending the length of his jumps. It's a shame that more couldn't have been made of previous abilities, as Diddy simply feels surplus to requirements unless you're playing with a second player. It's also frustrating that Nintendo has enforced waggle control for Retro's new game. While shaking the Wii Remote or Nunchuk to pound the ground feels extremely instinctive, it becomes more troublesome when used with directions. It also means that certain stages become needlessly tricky due to you being unable to respond as quickly as you would with traditional controls.

It's certainly not game-breaking, but it does highlight the fact that *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is a punishing game – especially on the later stages – that, while starting off relatively easy, soon gets insanely hard in places, with unfair difficulty spikes that wouldn't seem out of place on the SNES original.

OPINION

This is a great return for *Donkey Kong Country* and a good effort from Retro, but it does feel a little too safe. It lacks the cleverness of *Jungle Beat* and it has some frustrating difficulty spikes. It's still a great game; just not as great as I was hoping for.

Stuart Hunt

It's a pity that these frustrating moments exist, because *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is otherwise a triumph in game design, with cleverly constructed levels that are bursting with secrets to discover, smart gameplay mechanics that utilise both the foreground and background, and some beautiful visuals. Donkey Kong has a number of new moves but hasn't forgotten his roots and is able to ride mine carts and project himself through the air with strategically placed barrels, just as he could in his 16-bit days.

Difficulty aside, *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is a wonderful return to form and yet more evidence that Retro Studios really is the new Rare.

In a nutshell

It's insanely tough, but it's also beautiful to look at, with plenty of secrets to discover and some glorious visuals. What it lacks in innovation it more than makes up for in charm.

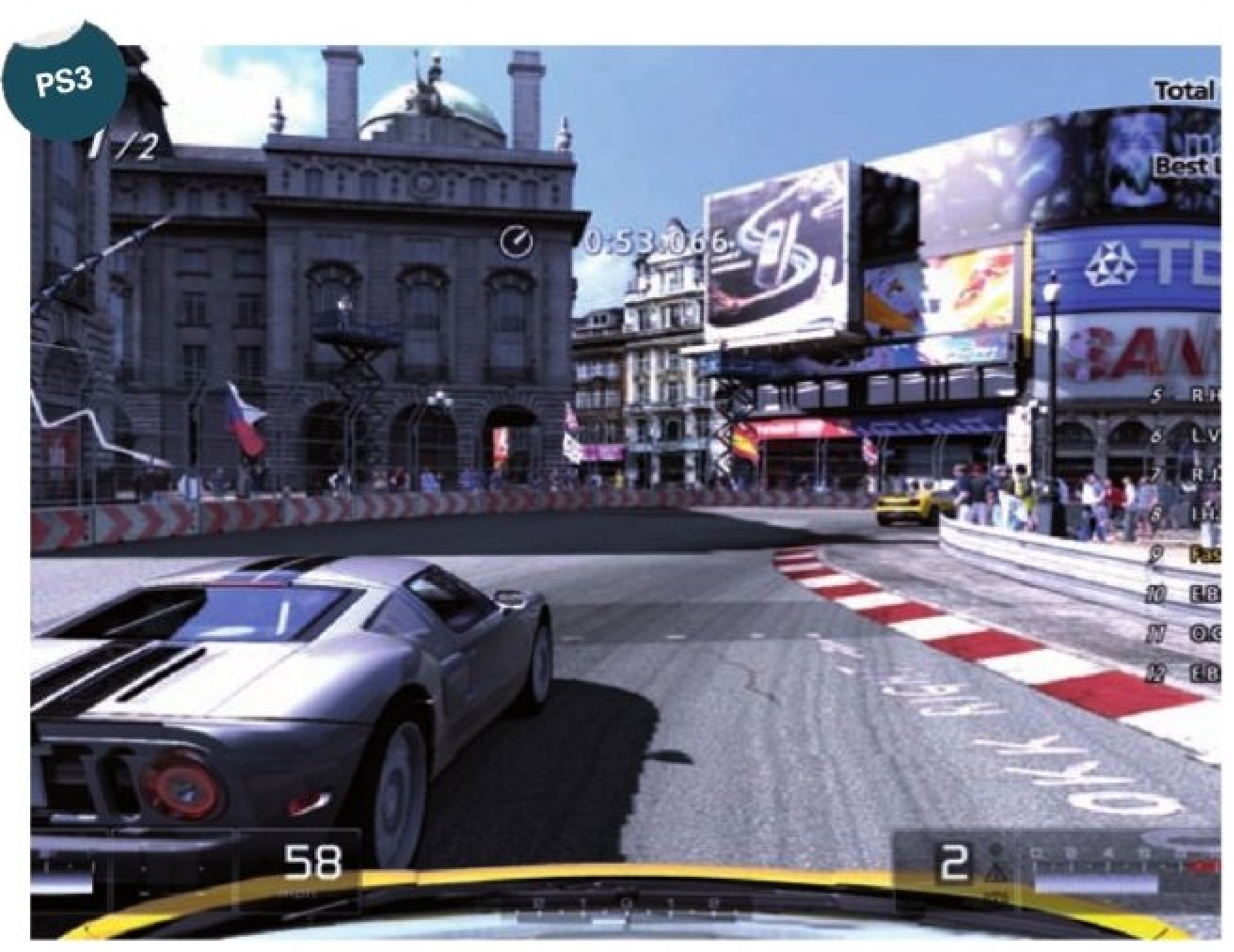
>> Scores

Presentation	88%
Graphics	98%
Sound	91%
Playability	89%
Addictivity	88%
Overall	**88%**

Gran Turismo 5

SONY DELIVERS HIGH-DEFINITION DÉJÀ VU

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SONY » **DEVELOPER:** POLYPHONY DIGITAL » **PLAYERS:** 1



» [PS3] Piccadilly Circus has never looked better. Apart from in real life.



Regardless of how long *Gran Turismo 5* has been in development, it still feels like an unfinished game. The irony, though, is that despite the fact that it feels incredibly rough in places, it remains a very polished racer. It's just not one that's as good as all the hype would have you believe.

If you've ever played the original game – now 14 years old, believe it or not – or later ones, you'll know exactly where you are with *GT5*, as it largely follows the same rigid template. There are a variety of different licences to pass, plenty of cups and circuits to win, and the ability to tweak the performance of your favourite car to perfection, down to the tiniest detail. It even introduces online play, and while there are still idiots out there on PSN who play it like they're playing *Burnout*, it's a surprisingly robust and generally enjoyable experience.



Visually it's something of a mixed bag, with certain tracks looking absolutely sensational, and others looking like slightly upscaled PS2 games. The audio also feels rather lacking, with many cars just not feeling throaty enough.

It's the gameplay where *Gran Turismo* excels, though, and once you get past your initial disappointment, you'll discover a ridiculously in-depth racer with wonderful handling and plenty to do. It's just a shame that, for the most part, it feels like a game we've already played.

OPINION



Yes, it took an age to get here, but *Gran Turismo 5* has finally arrived, and it's not half bad to boot. It was never going to live up to its lofty expectations and it definitely feels like it could have had a couple of months' more work, but there's no denying that it's a slick simulation.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	88%
Sound	76%
Playability	80%
Addictivity	84%
Overall	**83%**



» [XBLA] There's little more satisfying than building up a huge chasing pack and racking up the points when you eat them.

Pac-Man Championship Edition DX

NAMCO'S MASCOT STILL HAS THE MAGIC

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBLA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80)/£7.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



When a game has you playing until dawn's grey fingers reach across the sky, you know you're playing something special. After re-inventing *Pac-Man* in 2007 with the awesome *Pac-Man Championship Edition*, original creator Toru Iwatani is back with another highly impressive update.

Initially this appears very similar to *Championship Edition*. Each half of the maze is constantly redrawn once all pellets have been cleared, it still features retina-bleeding imagery, and it boasts the same five and ten-minute formats. The main differences with *DX*, though, are the addition of bombs that will send all on-screen ghosts back to their starting pen, and the behaviour of the incorporeal critters.

The vast majority of ghosts now sleep around the stage, only awakening when Pac-Man gets close to them. Once woken, the ghosts will follow him in a rainbow-coloured train, only stopping when they finally catch him or he manages to turn the tables by snacking on a power pill. It's a great little concept that's heightened by the introduction of new play mechanics like slowing down the gameplay whenever Pac-Man gets too near a stray ghost.



Add in a variety of gameplay modes including Score Attack, Time Attack and Ghost Combo; the ability to play with skins from past games; and nine different courses – including *Championship Edition*'s – and this is a nearly perfect score-attack game. It's a little too easy compared to the original *Championship Edition*, but that's our only real issue. Quality stuff.

OPINION



The ghost train is a wonderful little touch, but it's the variety of different gameplay modes on offer that make this new game a winner. It's also gratifying to see a classic game feel completely new but still true to its roots. I can't wait to see how later games in the series turn out.

Darran Jones

>> Scores

Presentation	85%
Graphics	82%
Sound	78%
Playability	95%
Addictivity	98%
Overall	**96%**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



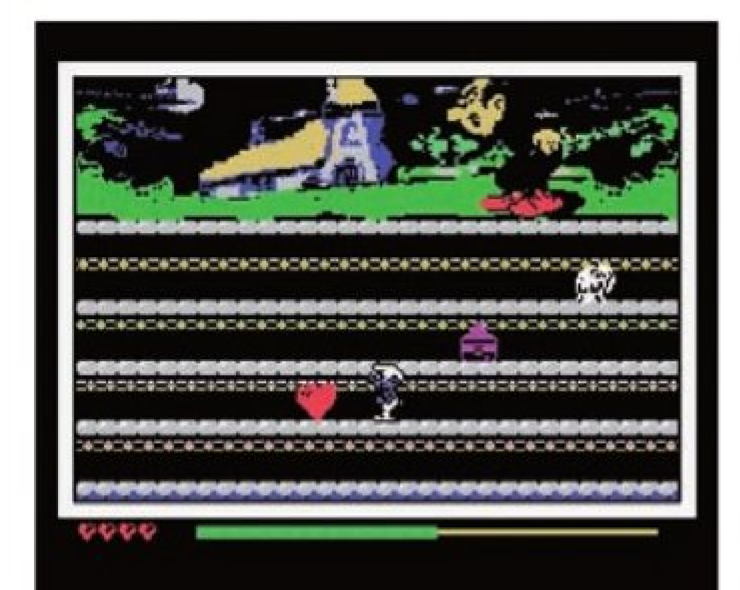
It's that time of year when we take stock of the last 12 months and start to think ahead; 2010 was a pretty good year for homebrew and indie games, and if the hyperbole and previews doing the rounds are to be believed, 2011 could prove to be better. As for New Year's resolutions, mine is 160x200 pixels in 16 colours. Sad yes, but I love that joke!

SMURF CHALLENGE

CHARMER AND SMURFETTE, SITTING IN A TREE…



» [Colecovision] Getting dizzy down the rapids.



Charmer Smurf is, as the Smurf naming tradition suggests, a silver-tongued rogue of a Smurf with an eye for the ladies – but despite Smurfette being the only female in the village, poor Charmer's powers of persuasion just aren't in the Nigel Havers league and haven't been enough to earn even a cuddle previously! But before he starts feeling even more blue, with an almost suspicious sense of timing a competition has been arranged for all takers in the Smurf village and, should anybody complete all of the surprisingly perilous tasks set, their prize is a dance and possibly a bit of a smooch with a certain young lady Smurf.

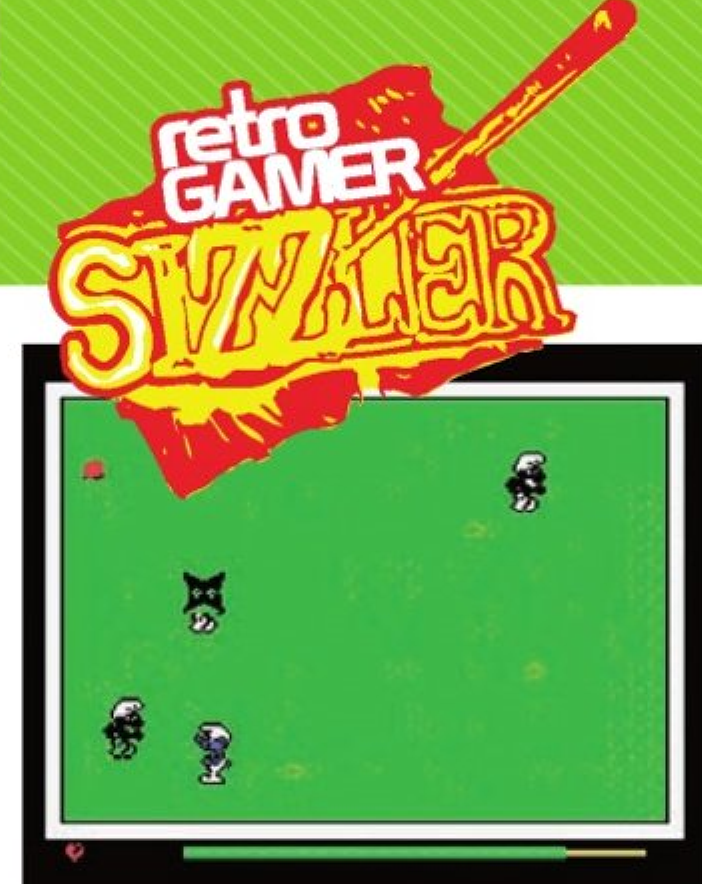
The challenge has been rather neatly divided into four parts, the first of which would be a leisurely stroll in the countryside were it not for the dangerous 'Bzzz Bzzz' flies, streams to leap across and egg-dropping birds. The action in this sub-game is quite reminiscent of *Moon Patrol*, as Charmer must leap over or duck under obstacles and will sometimes have to deal with multiple hazards simultaneously. The second trial is aquatic and sees the poor Smurf astride a log, travelling along a river that occasionally varies its speed while manoeuvring between rocks, crocodiles and whirlpools to grab the hearts distributed among the jeopardy by Smurfette herself.

Next, poor Charmer dives headlong into a pitched battle where he must either dodge or lob rocks at Gnaps – Smurfs bitten by a black fly that, apparently, causes them to change colour, makes them rather angry and reduces their vocabulary to just the word "gnap" – and collect a supply of red leaves before he attempts something that only the bravest Smurf would dare do even consider: entering Gargamel's cellar to grab the remaining hearts left lying around by Smurfette. These hearts arrive on conveyor belts along with the bottles of poison, skulls and other potentially deadly items that sorcerers usually tend to have lying about the place, and Charmer must jump up and down between belts to avoid collecting something noxious. Should Charmer reach his quota of hearts, he gets that dance and then it's back to the start with a higher difficulty level.

The graphics and sound, as should be expected from a game about The Smurfs, are cheerful throughout and, although the flies can occasionally be a little hard to make out during the first challenge, generally everything is well defined and clear. There are four levels of skill to choose from with the Colecovision controller's number pad at the start of a game, with the easiest mode being aimed at younger gamers while the hardest is likely to give them nightmares.

Although the four smaller games included in *Smurf Challenge* probably wouldn't warrant a cartridge release on their own due to their lack of variety, rolling them up into one package in this way works remarkably well, and Charmer's quest for Smurfette's affections is entertaining – the inclusion of the children's difficulty level was a Smurfing good idea too.

91%



» [Colecovision] Where are you all coming from?



» **FORMAT:** COLECOVISION
» **DEVELOPED BY:** JEAN-PHILIPPE MEOLA
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/SMURF
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** TBA



» [Colecovision] I'm blue da ba dee!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

BALLS TO THE WALLS

» **FORMAT:** EXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** VICASSEMBLY » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BALLS-WALLS » **PRICE:** FREE

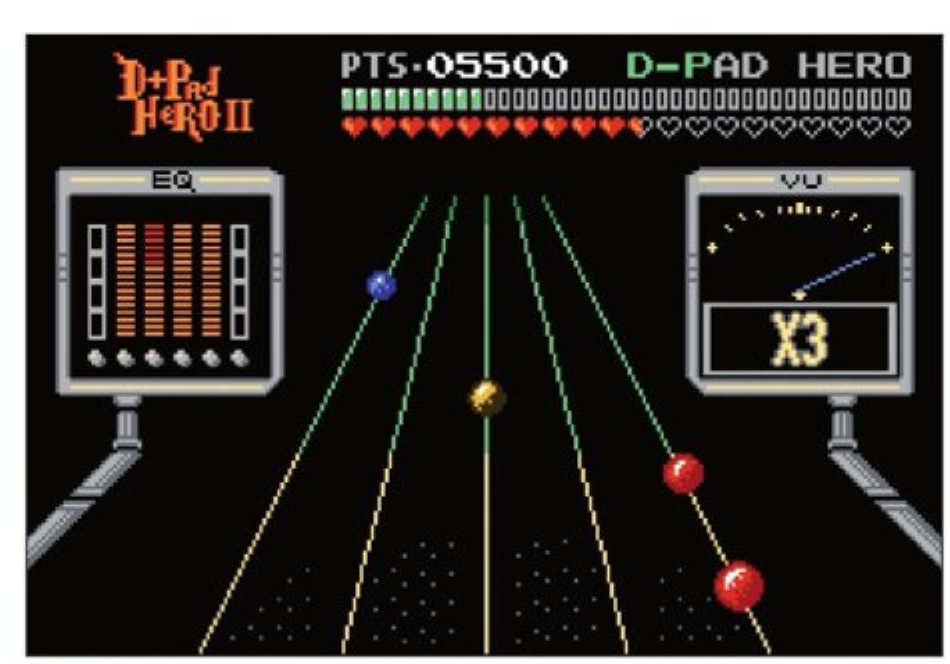
This game is based on *BrickBreaker*, the *Breakout*-with-power-ups variant that comes bundled with Blackberries. This means that, along with bonus items that among other functions launch multiple balls, give the bat a brick-blasting weapon or reverse its movement controls, features such as being able to decide the initial trajectory of the ball before it gets launched and the wall rather alarmingly inching its way downwards after a set amount of time have been included.

This is developer vicassembly's first machine code game for the VIC-20 and, apart from some flickering on the ball and the occasional hiccup with the laser weapon, it's been put together pretty solidly While they may not be astounding, the graphics and sound effects are acceptable and the presentation hasn't been skimped on either. *Balls To The Walls* won't win any awards for originality, but it's still surprisingly addictive and serves up 34 levels, so fans of bouncing balls against structurally unsound masonry could do far worse.

67%

» [VIC-20] You're fighting with lost confidence.





» [NES] Left, left, A, A… this isn't the Konami code?!



D-PAD HERO 2

» **FORMAT:** NES » **DEVELOPER:** D-PAD HERO TEAM » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DPAD-2 » **PRICE:** FREE

A mysterious force has broken the Master Pad into six pieces; a former *D-Pad Hero* and the sacred Backup Pad must recover these pieces to restore peace and harmony. Yes, it's a silly storyline for the return of *D-Pad Hero*, but, rather than rest on their laurels, the developers have listened to fans and drastically reworked their game.

As a result, the new playlist is bigger than the original while still being of the same high standard. The new controls, where left, right, select, B or A on the pad represent one of the five lanes on screen, are significantly less fiddly than having a sphere with an arrow to indicate which move to make. With each stage having eight challenges – some of which are mutually exclusive – and three difficulty settings, *D-Pad Hero* has more to keep players busy than its predecessor.

89%

MISSION 2 MIR

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** RAYMOND VAN HOORN » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MIR » **PRICE:** FREE



» [MSX] The stars look very different today.

Welcome to the year 2050, where an intergalactic calamity has eradicated every MSX computer except for one; the Mir space station, thought to be destroyed 50 years ago, has survived and contains the only remaining machine. And now that last bastion of retro goodness is under threat from the same forces that ravaged the Earth, so only intergalactic pilot Roger Smith can save it!

Mission 2 Mir is written in MSX BASIC and as a result is sluggish, has some suspect collision detection that occasionally sees bullets sailing through enemies, and can only manage the player, a bullet and one opponent on the screen at any time – it also has a couple of enemy types that jump around the play area randomly and can materialise on top of the player. Connoisseurs of badly designed games may find some entertainment, but the less masochistic should steer clear.

24%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [BBC] It's like he never left.

>> It's only rocks and rolling

Visitors to R3PLAY in Blackpool will have seen a huge television running a BBC Micro game, but some of them might not have realised that it was brand new! *Repton: The Lost Realms* was originally developed by Paras Sidapara as a sequel to *Repton 3*, and Tom Walker has taken the code and turned it into what Retro Software is calling arguably the best *Repton* engine for the Beeb. **kikstart.eu/repton-tlr**.



» [Spectrum] Help Gene hunt for his body.

>> I ain't got nobody

The second release at R3PLAY was another sequel. *Ghost Castle 2* by Jarrod Bentley and Sean Gee follows on where their original arcade adventure left off as Gene the ghost embarks on a search for his own body in a massive 256-location map. We'll be looking at it properly next issue, but it seems to have that classic Spectrum feel, and **kikstart.eu/gc2** will already get you to a download.



» [VIC-20] Shall we play a game?

>> Never been so much fun

Theater Of War is a WWII-themed strategy game for the unexpanded VIC-20, which was entered into the 4K category of the 2010 Minigame competition. Despite its size, the author has crammed in seven types of unit to deploy and three terrains to either traverse or work around. The discussion thread at VIC site Denial is behind **kikstart.eu/theater-war** and the Minigame site is at **kikstart.eu/minigame.**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> Back to Sonic's roots

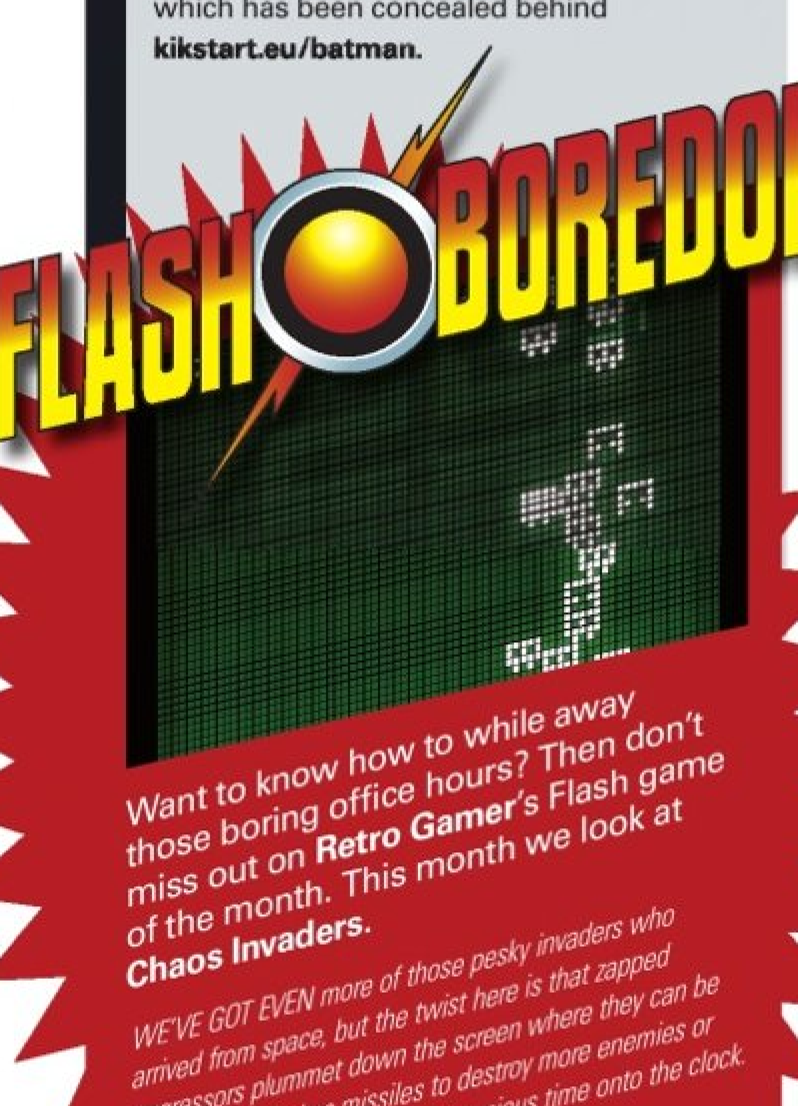
Hot on the trainer-clad heels of *Sonic 4* comes news about *Sonic Fan Remix,* which does exactly what it says on the tin and takes the original *Sonic* levels and remixes them. The results so far look and sound pretty decent and the controls feel far closer to *Sonic*'s heritage than Sega's recent 2D attempt, although at just shy of 100MB, hedgehog fans on slower internet connections might want to think twice before downloading the playable demo!



>> Sock! Kapow! Zap!

Fans of the Dark Knight will probably be interested to hear about a remake of the isometric 3D *Batman* game published by Ocean. The graphics have been reworked and look solid enough, although one slight side effect of the process is that Bats himself has come out looking rather cutesy! A playable preview is already available to download from the thread at Retro Remakes which has been concealed behind **kikstart.eu/batman.**

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Chaos Invaders.**

WE'VE GOT EVEN more of those pesky invaders who arrived from space, but the twist here is that zapped aggressors plummet down the screen where they can be caught and used as missiles to destroy more enemies or fired into oblivion to add some precious time onto the clock. kikstart.eu/chaos-inv

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



TEMPURA OF THE DEAD

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TEMPURA



As President Thompson flees the zombie-infested Capitol aboard a helicopter loaded with subordinates, he sees a lone samurai standing his ground and, surprisingly, winning the fight against the hordes of undead. Spurred into action and pausing only to grab a machine gun and pass control of the country to his vice president, Thompson leaps into the fray alongside the noble warrior.

The former president and Sugimoto the samurai must destroy all of the germs in each level, but they aren't going to be wiped out with something meant for disinfecting the loo – each Germ of Calamity is at least twice as tall as a man and spews forth bile when hit. The two characters can be switched between at will and have their own attributes, Thompson can't jump as high as Sugimoto and his gun isn't as deadly a weapon as the samurai's katana, but he also doesn't have to get as close to enemies.

Tempura Of The Dead has been styled to look and sound like a NES game and that imitation extends to how it plays. The difficulty level has been set rather high and laying keepie-uppie with severed zombie heads – which powers up the Tempura Fever mode and gives score bonuses – or timing daring leaps between platforms can be tricky. It's pretty reasonable at 240 Points, but more casual platforming fans should try before they buy.



WILD TURRET

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/WILD-TURRET



***Wild Turret* is** a remake of 1982 DOS game *Paratrooper.* Helicopters circle overhead dropping troops and a gun turret must be used to destroy the copters and take down the interlopers; the turret itself can't move, but the line of fire can be rotated through a hundred and eighty degrees to cover the airspace above it.

The only problem *Wild Turret* has is that it doesn't really offer a difficulty curve; everything starts out quite busy but doesn't get any harder. The game is over if six parachutists make it to the ground and overrun the turret or a jet's homing missile takes it out, but most players should find it easy to prevent either so the ultimate enemies are long battles and losing concentration.



KRAZY ALIENZ

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/KRAZY-ALIENZ



Yes, it's yet another *Space Invaders* clone and, since XBLIG already has some great variations on that theme, the developer of *Krazy Alienz* has, along with lumbering it with a ridiculous name and some appropriately 'kooky' in-game graphics, thrown a few quirks into the formula.

That just translates into a couple of point-scoring bonus rounds and a series of power-ups dropped by the UFOs, some helpful like temporary boosts to the weaponry and others a hindrance. Shoot-'em-up fans might want to give the trial download a whirl before handing over their 80 Points because, while it's certainly fun to play and reasonably well presented, there's nothing new and the chances are they'll already have a good example of the species.

HOMEBREW HEROES

JON MINES AND HIS TEAM ARKANIX LABS (ARKANIXLABS.COM) HAVE BEEN WORKING ON C64 GAMES FOR WELL OVER 15 YEARS, AND A COUPLE OF MONTHS BACK RELEASED AN UPDATE OF A MAP-EDITING TOOL BEING DEVELOPED FOR CRIMSON TWILIGHT, THE RPG THEY'RE CURRENTLY WORKING ON



Retro Gamer: Arkanix Labs have been working on games for quite a while now; how did it all get started?

Jon Mines: The beginnings of Arkanix Labs started in 1989 when a few friends, all living in the same city, formed a small group on the C64 to have some fun creating demos. After a short while the idea to create games came up and we set about creating graphics and coding some bits here and there, but progress was slow and some of the guys dropped out of computers altogether. The only thing that came from those days was my desire to create games was growing and I needed to find a new crew of guys to make these games happen. Move along two years and the founding members of our team are all together and work starts on games. As most of us are students at the time, the chances to work on the games come and go. In late 1993 we change our name to Arkanix Labs and starting selling our own developed games and importing/distributing games from Europe.

RG: And *Crimson Twilight* has been an ongoing Arkanix Labs project for quite a while; tell us more about it…

JM: *Crimson Twilight* is based on a storyline taken from an old pencil-and-paper role-playing gaming group from my youth. The story is broken into a trilogy of planned releases; the first chapter is about discovering a conspiracy and breaking down its powerbase, which leads into the second chapter and the re-opening of the forsaken rift and finally the final chapter facing down the foe that has haunted you the entire trilogy and stopping the ritual of darkness. The game itself is a 2D tile-based engine, similar in nature to games like the *Ultima* series, *Legacy Of The Ancients*, and *Legend Of Blacksilver*. A very early beta of the game engine is available for download from our website, but shortly we hope to release a playable preview of the game.

RG: What would you consider the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing games?

JM: The enjoyable parts are certainly those times when you work with your fellow team-mates and the project moves along at a steady pace firing on all cylinders. Creating games is fun, but working with my friends on something we all enjoy is simply one of the best benefits I can think of. As for difficulties? Well, those days when nothing seems to go right do pop up on occasion. Developing something that others will enjoy is important but it isn't easy. You have to try to detach yourself from your project and think as an outsider – is this fun or creative? You'll waste a lot of time trying to find those answers if you're not careful.

RG: Of the games you've worked on to date, which would be the game you're most proud of and why?

JM: I'll have to say *Crimson Twilight* because it's our most ambitious project to date. It's truly an all-hands-on-board project and each of us are pushing the other to perform at a high level of quality. The finished project will certainly be our best work to date.

RG: And what plans do you have for the future, any genre you'd like to try but haven't to date?

JM: Oh yeah, plans are set for a few other projects. I've worked on a push scroll platformer for a while and need to finally get a preview hammered out. I've also wanted to revisit one of our previous releases, *Lazer Duel*, and release an upgraded deluxe version for a while now.

RG: And finally, what advice can you give to any would-be indie developers that are reading?

JM: Two things I think are rather important when you're trying your hand with indie or hobby development. Firstly, you should try to find like-minded individuals and form a team. Nothing is better than working with friends on a goal and finishing it. Secondly, if you can, publish previews in an environ that is positive for your platform – feedback, especially positive feedback, is an awesome motivator and will give you that extra push to complete the project when things get sticky.



» [C64] An almost complete two-player shoot-'em-up.

HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games that Jon can't live without

1. **Hurrican (PC)** *Turrican* on the PC and lots of C64 flavor!
2. **Battle For Wesnoth (PC and Mac)** Great strategy game and good example of quality indie development.
3. **Galcon (various)** It's a simple game but it's very addictive.
4. **One Button Arthur (Flash)** A great escape when you need to fade away for five minutes.
5. **Space Chunks 1 and 2 (PC)** *Asteroids* on steroids. Mindless shooting at its best!



» [C64] Still being worked on, this is *Crimson Twilight*.



» [C64] Map editors – like Lego but more intricate!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» www.unseen64.net is a great resource to finding more about canned and unfinished games.

A GAMING LEGEND SPEAKS

Gentlemen,

Congratulations on your Games Media Award. It is richly deserved. I have often pointed to your magazine as the gold standard in the industry. I am glad you have gotten the recognition you deserve for all of your effort.

Enjoy the accolades,

David Crane

Thanks David, that's a really nice thing to say. We all worked really hard in 2010 and it's great to see all the hard work being recognised by the industry and respected gaming veterans like yourself.

THE ELUSIVE LAST NINJA

Dear Retro Gamer,

Please could you do a feature on the PC game *Warblade*, which is a retro-style, 2D shoot-'em-up. You could even do an article on the hip Amiga games *Deluxe Pac-Man* and *Deluxe Galaga*. Also, is there any chance of an article on the C64 magazine *Commodore Format*? And do you know where I could buy the PlayStation 2 game *Last Ninja*? I have been looking for it since launch but have been unable to track down a copy.

I Learmonth

There's a good reason you haven't been able to get a copy of *The Last Ninja* on the PS2 – the game was canned. It was titled *The Last Ninja 4*, and if take a trip to the website www.unseen64.com, they have some early images of the game. With regards to covering *Warblade* and *Deluxe* games in future issues we'll certainly see what we can do. We've actually been planning a feature that looks at the best unofficial conversion and arcade clones, maybe we'll bring the idea forward.

SHENBOO HOO

Dear Retro Gamer,

Is there any truth that there is going to be a *Shenmue III*, because I am a big fan of the games. In my opinion the *Shenmue* games are the greatest of all time.

Christopher Dyke

We feel your pain, Christopher. But this year there has at least seen some positive noises coming from Sega about its feelings towards seeing a third *Shenmue* getting made. At the start of this year, Sega said it would happily offer exclusivity rights of a third instalment to any of the three main platform holders if they paid for the development costs. And as well as Ryo making an appearance in *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing* there was also the announcement of *Shenmue Town*, a social networking game designed by Yu Suzuki's new company. Unfortunately for fans, though, its release is limited to Japan.

If the issue for Sega is still demand than in an ideal world we'd like to see Sega re-release the first two games as free downloads on XBLA and PSN, spurring more people to experience the games and hopefully increase demand for a third game. The other solution we can think to keep costs down would be for Sega to simply make the game using the original *Shenmue* engine. Do you think most fans honestly care less about what *Shenmue III* looks like? We just want to see it get made and the series finished.

MEMORY UNLIKE AN ELEPHANT

Dear Retro Gamer,

After four and a bit years of hard slog, I have just submitted my PhD thesis. I discovered Retro Gamer about halfway through and subscribed immediately; the arrival of the mag each month provided a much-needed break, for which I thank all of you. And so to the reason I've written. Back in the late Eighties/early Nineties I, like many others, had a C64. I have fond memories of many games, mostly Dizzy-related, but there is one game which, although I remember it vividly, I cannot think of its name.

It was a platformer and you played as this cutesy elephant on a mission to rescue its family. These elephants were trapped

STAR LETTER

FINAL DOOM



» If the back issue you're after is out of stock, check out the Retro Gamer iPhone/iPad app.

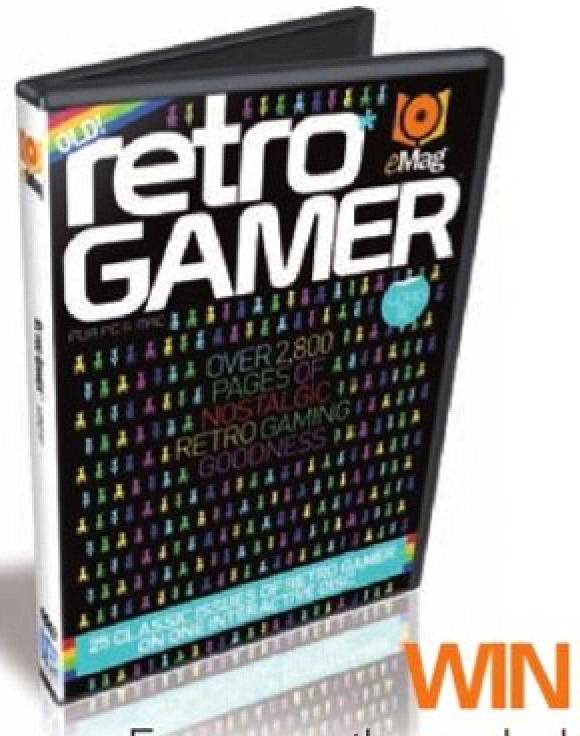
Dear Retro Gamer,

I was going through your back issue archive, and noticed that your back issue 44, with *Doom* on the cover, was out of stock. I was just wondering if you ever reprint old issues as I'd really like to get my hands on that particular issue.

Love the magazine, and do keep up the awesome work.

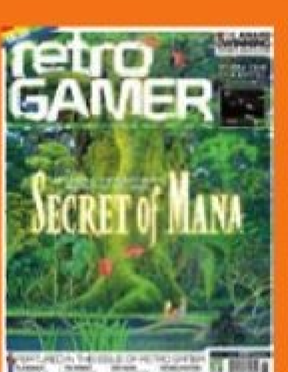
AJ

We currently have no plans to reprint any of our old issues, so at the moment the best advice we can offer you is to keep checking eBay. If you own an iPhone or iPad, remember that back issues are available to download as PixelMags. Actually, sod it, we'll just award you Star Letter this month, which gets you a copy of the eMag volume 2. The issue you seek is on there. We are good to you lot.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



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» YOUTUBE UPDATE

SEGA RAN A competition this month that awarded you with a limited edition version of Sonic Colours if you wore a Sonic the Hedgehog hat in an inventive way. Darran took first prize with a Kinect video of Sonic Free Riders. You can witness the twit making a complete fool of himself in the usual place. **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz**



» **[Dreamcast] Not getting a proper finale to *Shenmue* is like Ryo giving us a knee in the cubes, as this screenshot ably illustrates.**

all over the world, so there was a level in France, a level in the US, etc. You could shoot peanuts from your trunk to take out enemies. I spent hours playing it and I dearly hope that someone can tell me what it was called.

Oh, and sorry if I missed it pre-subscription, but any chance of a *Zelda* special? I'm gradually working my way backwards through the franchise having watched enviously as, back in the day, my Nintendo-owning mates hacked and puzzled their way around Hyrule.
Mitch.

Hi, Mitch. We're pretty confident the game you're describing is *CJ's Elephant Antics*. Funny enough, it's another Codemasters game, which might explain why you're so fond of it – being a big *Dizzy* fan and all. You will also be pleased to hear that we have already done a look back at the *Legend Of Zelda* series, it appeared in issue 51. If you're struggling to get hold of a copy, that particular article can be found for free on our sister site www.nowgamer.com.

PRAISE YOU

Dear Retro Gamer,

I would just like to congratulate you on your recent award for best gaming magazine in the UK. I've been following **Retro Gamer** from the very beginning and it's absolutely fantastic to see that all your hard work has finally been rewarded. The magazine has gone from strength to strength in the past few years, so it's great to see that the games industry has finally realised that you don't need to have constant previews of *Gears Of War* in order to capture the spirit of gaming.
David McKenzie

Cheers, David. Even though we knew the entire team and fantastic freelancers worked their little socks off this year, we were still shocked to win the award – especially considering who we were up against. The award sits pride of place on Darran's desk next – he's already managed to put a scratch on it.

PRAISE YOU TOO

Dear Retro Gamer,

Just got the latest issue through and I'm gobsmacked by just how good it is. The Christmas cover is absolutely wonderful, and it really takes me back to the good old days of gaming. For me, though, it's the content that makes this issue an absolute winner (and possibly my favourite issue ever) as it has something for everyone. The additional Amiga and PC coverage is long overdue and greatly welcomed, the making of *Banshee* was a joy to read through, while The Terminal Man feature instantly transported me back to the *Crash* days of old. By far the most impressive »

> “Do you think most fans honestly care less about what Shenmue III looks like?”



RETROBATE PROFILE

Name:	Robert Dunning
Joined:	29 Oct 2010
Location:	Redcar, United Kingdom
Occupation:	Production Technician
Website:	Not given
Fave Games Systems:	Sega Model 2



» **[C64] We managed to guess the mysterious game in record time. It was easy; we took Mitch's love for Codemasters, and simply followed the trail of peanuts.**



* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 126,750

DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: EXPRESS RAIDER

Why I picked it: I was trying to re-create the infamous Blow Job picture from an early issue of **Retro Gamer**. **Handy tip:** Take down enemies as quickly as possible, otherwise you'll end up on a departing carriage.



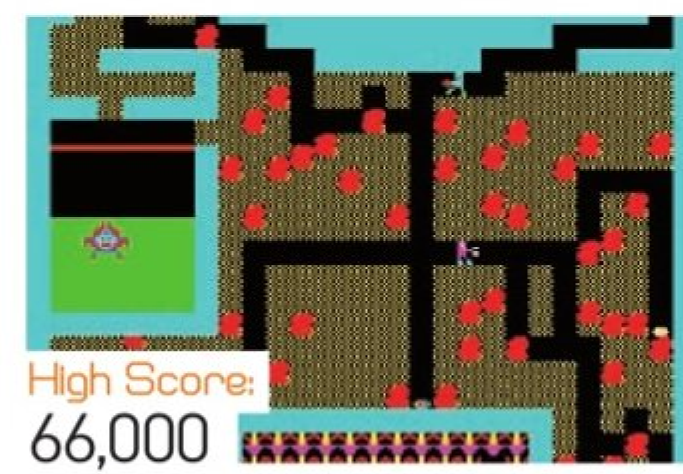
High Score: 31,150



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: CAPTAIN SILVER

Why I picked it: I'm really not sure and regretted it instantly. This game is worse than I remember. **Handy tip:** I'd say flat out avoid it, but if you insist playing it makes sure you catch the fairies, they enhance the power of your sword.



High Score: 66,000



MARTYN

CHOSEN GAME: THE PIT

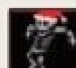
Why I picked it: Paul Drury mentioned this great little game recently, and it's one I'd never played before. **Handy tip:** You need to bag all seven diamonds to earn the triple score bonus at the end.

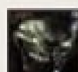
From the forum

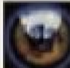
» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

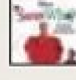
Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What retro game do you resolve to finish in 2011?

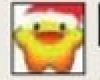

Deadzoo
Starflight on the Mega Drive. Back when it came out I played it for weeks and weeks and got to what turned out to be the very end of the game, but couldn't work out what to do and had to return it to my mate. Well, it was his copy! I have my own one now so hopefully have the free time to finish it.

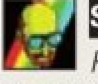

thevulture
Metroid: Zero Mission. Why? Because I foolishly passed it up at the time and it wasn't until **RG** covered it that I took any interest. I've got some catching up to do.

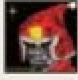

fgasking
First Samurai on the C64. Known about it for years but only really just started to play it. A very large game and a lot of fun - sort of a martial arts version of *Turrican*.

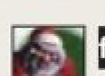

the_hawk
Not so much to complete a game, but to get a respectable score on *Missile Command*. As much as I love the game I am absolutely terrible at it. Seeing World Record holder Tony Temple play the game at R3Play has really inspired me to learn how to play it properly.


JetSetWilly
Any. I've got so many to start/finish that I'll be retired or buried before I do.

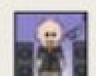

Miketendo
Shatterhand for the NES. I still to this day cannot get past the last level.

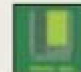

Morkin
Zelda: Ocarina Of Time. It's just the game I always wish I'd finished, but have never seemed to get very far into - partly through time constraints, and partly through my own badness at the game. Have always been jealous of those who talk about the later levels; I want to be part of that crowd.

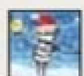

SirClive
Final Fantasy VII. I played through to the big battle with Proud Clod (about 40 hours of play!) back in 1997 but hadn't levelled up enough so couldn't beat him. Two years later I started from scratch and played about 30-odd hours only for a mishap with a memory card to scupper me again. *FFVII* is in my top five games of all time but I still haven't seen the end. I can't let it get to 15 years without completing the game so 2011 has to be the year!

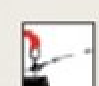

Antiriad2097
I think this year it will have to be Ovine By Design's new remake of The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad (assuming it gets finished).

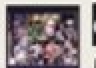
felgekarp
I think it's about time I put that *Shadow Of The Colossus* I bought earlier in the year in my PS2.

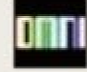

djcarlos
Embarrassingly enough… *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

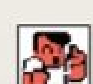

bsg
Finders Keepers on the CPC464+. Played and finished all of the others in the *Magic Knight* series, albeit on different systems, *Spellbound* on A8, *Knight Tyme* on Spectrum and *Stormbringer* on C64 but never played *Finders Keepers* - perfect thing to start me on my CPC path.


Mire Mare
There are a few games I play for nostalgia, and because I never finished them as a kid, during Christmas and New Year. *Maniac Mansion* is probably the one I've always wanted to finish but I've never managed. I always get sidetracked into microwaving hamsters. Then there's the more recent *Monty's Christmas Special* which has remained unfinished since I started to play it three Christmases ago. Hopefully, it'll be fourth time lucky. I resolve to finish these before I go back to work on 5 January!


markopoloman
I aim to get beyond level 3 of *One Man And His Droid* without running out of time or sending those bloody Ramboids to the teleporter in the wrong order by mistake! (C64 version of course).


nakamura
Ocarina Of Time. Being a huge RPG and Zelda fan, I feel a bit dirty for not completing this. I am currently at the water temple but lost interest. Really, though, I am waiting for the 3DS version.


dste
Next year I'm going to be determined to finally finish *The Adventures Of Rad Gravity* for the NES. Every year I think that this will be the year where I finally complete it and 2011 will be the 21st anniversary of me first playing it so it seems like a great time to finally finish off the final boss once and for all and to stop having it hang over my head.


Rory Milne
My resolution for 2011 is to finish *Mire Mare* – that's if the Stampers or Rare or a combination of the two finish its coding and release the damn thing! By my reckoning it's been almost exactly 26 years in the making (first advertised around December 1984) so in theory completing it should be more than worthy of a New Year's resolution.

Jeremiah Jones
Shining Force III on Sega Saturn; it's simply too good to enjoy only halfway done.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

SURVIVAL HORRORS

jdanddiet At the moment I'm playing *Call Of Cthulhu Dark Corners Of The Earth* on the Xbox, which can definitely be classed as survival horror. To be honest, it's fricking scary in places! One I've struggled to get into featured in **RG** recently - the Gamecube game *Eternal Darkness*.

Raziel The original *F.E.A.R.* (PC version). Not a survival horror game but it still gets me… especially the last level. Speaking of *Chaosium* (*Call Of Cthulhu*), I always liked *Nephilim*.

Rinoa I love survival horror. *Silent Hill 2* is my favourite game in the genre. Nothing beats psychological horror! Love *Parasite Eve* and the old *Resident Evils* as well, although not got round to *RE4* and *RE5* just yet.

RAIDER REBOOT

thevulture Potential is there; Crystal Dynamics is a very good developer, but it'll have to go some to match *Uncharted*, especially as expecting a showing of number three some time soon. Hopefully the competition will create some creative ideas from both sides, rather than one 'borrow' ideas from other. What ever happens, lets hope we don't see another *Angel Of Darkness* incident.

andyc They did a good job on the last few, so as long as they avoid an *Angel Of Darkness*-type change of direction it could be really good. Fingers crossed.

gman72 I even quite enjoyed *Angel Of Darkness* so there is no way I'm gonna dislike this.

SNOW

Megamixer It's amazing how you can love snow as a kid then immediately hate it when you start work. Thanks to last year's snowfall, I had an hour's walk to work in -10 temperatures. Nightmare.

felgekarp We had about an inch overnight - as the actress said to the vicar. Most of it's cleared from the main roads now, side roads will be a bugger tomorrow, though, I'd imagine.

Helensification Well the garden looks great covered in white (hides the weeds) but the thought of the couple of inches on the car and the inevitable trip to work on ungritted roads is not so great.

TyronW Spent most the day building an igloo with family – anyone else attempted this? 10+ inches of snow = once in a lifetime opportunity that should not be wasted on snowmen!

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Sonic is the best?

Sonic The Hedgehog [Mega Drive] — Sonic Colours [Wii]

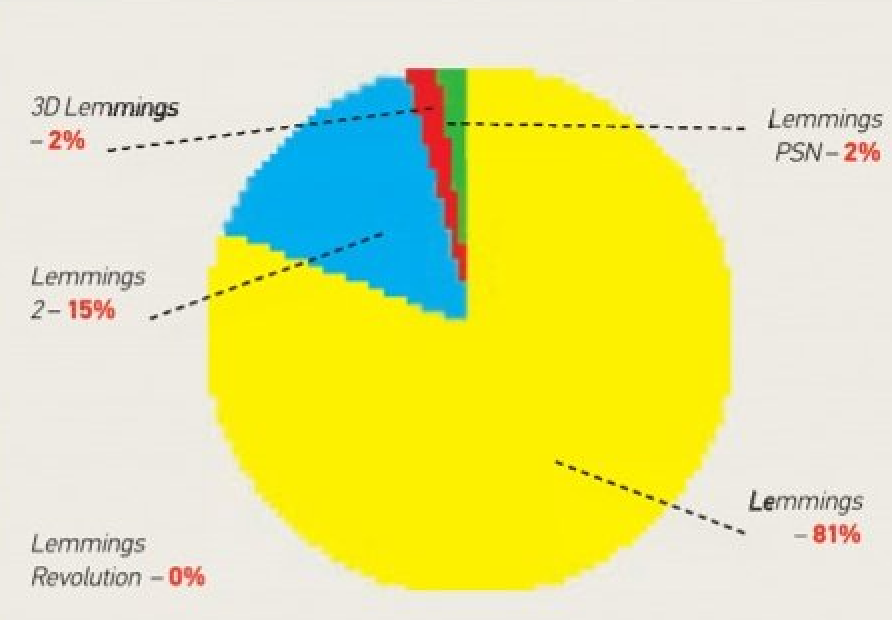
91% — 9%

pforson
I think *Sonic 1* is the peak of the series. Every game since has diluted its brilliance.

Team Alfie
Colours is to *Sonic* what *Galaxy* is to *Mario*. I took a chance on it and was stunned.

HOT TOPIC

Best Lemmings Game



"The original *Lemmings* - pretty much signified the start of a new genre of gaming" **– kelp7**

"I voted for *Lemmings 2*. I enjoyed it immensely; probably more than the first game. Loved the new skills including the totally pointless Pole Vaulter! Also Amiga and ST versions had different levels!" **– retrogarden**

part of this month though was the Rare feature. I can't believe that a mag would be so bold as to dedicate so much coverage to a single topic. Keep it up, **Retro Gamer**; you're currently on fire.
Sam Williams

Pleased to hear that you enjoyed reading our Christmas issue, Sam. It took us a lot of effort, hair pulling and planning to pull it all together in time but we're pleased with how it turned out and are appreciative of all the positive feedback it's been receiving. Following our unexpected GMA win, we really wanted to end this year on a high, and it seems, in your eyes at least, we certainly achieved our aim.

WORST ARTICLE EVER 2

Dear Retro Gamer,
Okay, this is just taking the piss. I looked through your current issue and it's blatantly obvious that you just don't understand what a magazine about retro games should contain. *Shadow Of The Colossus* should *never* appear in a magazine about retro games. Yes, I know you tagged it with "Future Classic" (something that it most definitely is not) but with a brand new version coming out this is quite obviously **Retro Gamer**'s way of simply trying to secure advertising for a new product. It's absolutely shameful.

By far my biggest problem, though, is with the sheer number of pointless articles that appear in the current issue. I mean, who honestly gives a crap about PC coverage? It was pointless then, and it's pointless now. If you want me to keep buying your magazine every month then put in proper retro coverage like the Spectrum and Commodore 64. I have no interest in PC gaming and even less interest in the vastly overrated Rare. The fact that you would waste 16 pages on such a rubbish company is absolutely beyond me and I was so incensed over the unfair coverage that the article received that I decided not to read it. I bet it's just full of you guys fawning over them anyway. If you are going to dedicate this sort of magazine space to a feature and cover, then do it on things people actually want to see like *Jet Set Willy*, Software Projects or Matthew Smith. If this downward spiral continues then I will have no choice but to stop buying your magazine.
Matthew Lightbourne


[PS2] Matthew's not a fan of *Shadow Of Colossus*, or Rare, or the Future Classic feature.

> "The additional Amiga and PC coverage is long overdue and greatly welcomed"

Hi, Matt. Come to moan about another feature you haven't read? Whatever your beef with *Shadow Of The Colossus* or Rare, you have to remember that no mag can cater for the specific needs of one individual. The 16 pages we dedicated to Rare – one of the remaining and oldest-serving software houses in Britain – was a special case and something we won't be doing every month. Where's your Christmas sprit, man? Next you'll be complaining about the porn in the classifieds that doesn't exist because you've just presumed it there. By the way, you are suggesting a combined 16 pages looking at Matthew Smith, *Jet Set Willy* and Software Projects, right? Given that they're three very similar topics.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

New Year's Resolutions
Darran's is to finally interview the Stamper brothers, just so we can do another 16-page feature and annoy Mr Lightbourne. Stuart's is to finish his screenplay. It's about two cops, one named Lt. Chalk, the other Lt. Cheese, who have to put aside their differences to bring down a drug-peddling priest, who, it transpires, is an estranged relative of both cops. Steve's resolution is to get a role in the movie. He's gunning for the lead parts – he thinks he has the chops, and the malleable hair, to play both cops.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN
Game Room
I'd never have thought it, but Game Room is bloody good at the moment. I'm been hammering *Amidar* and *Twinbee* and there's more arcade goodness on the way. Is this the final death knell or a new beginning?





STUART
Vanquish
I'm still working through *Vanquish* – I don't know why it's taking me so long to finish the thing; it's not even a long game. I'm pretty sure I'm on the last act now, so I just need to snatch a half hour next month to put it to bed.





MARTYN
Battlefield 1943
I know the maps inside out and I've seen every trick in the book a thousand times, yet I keep coming back. It's the best online console shooter ever, and the fact there are no daft upgrades means it's perfectly balanced.



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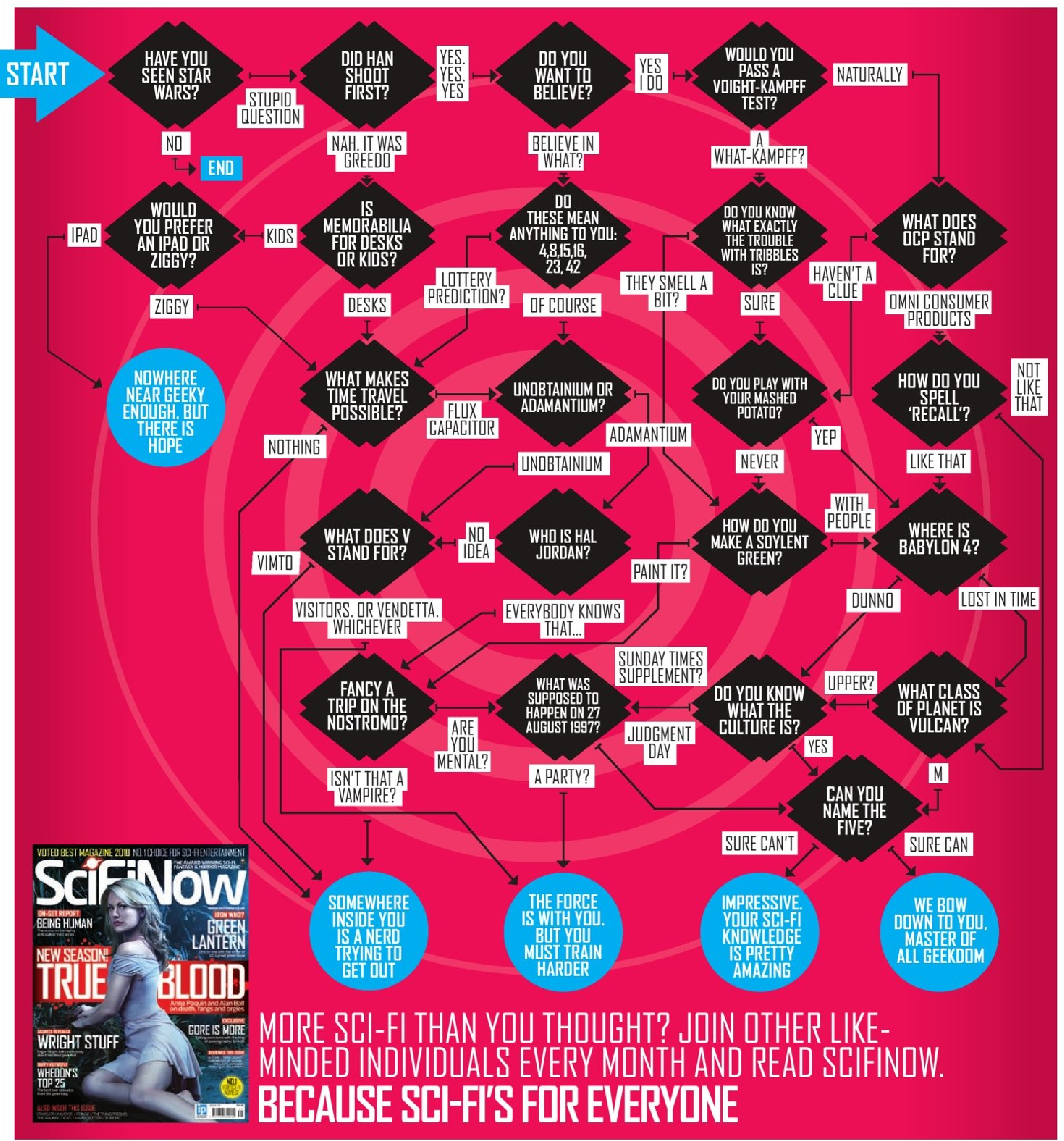
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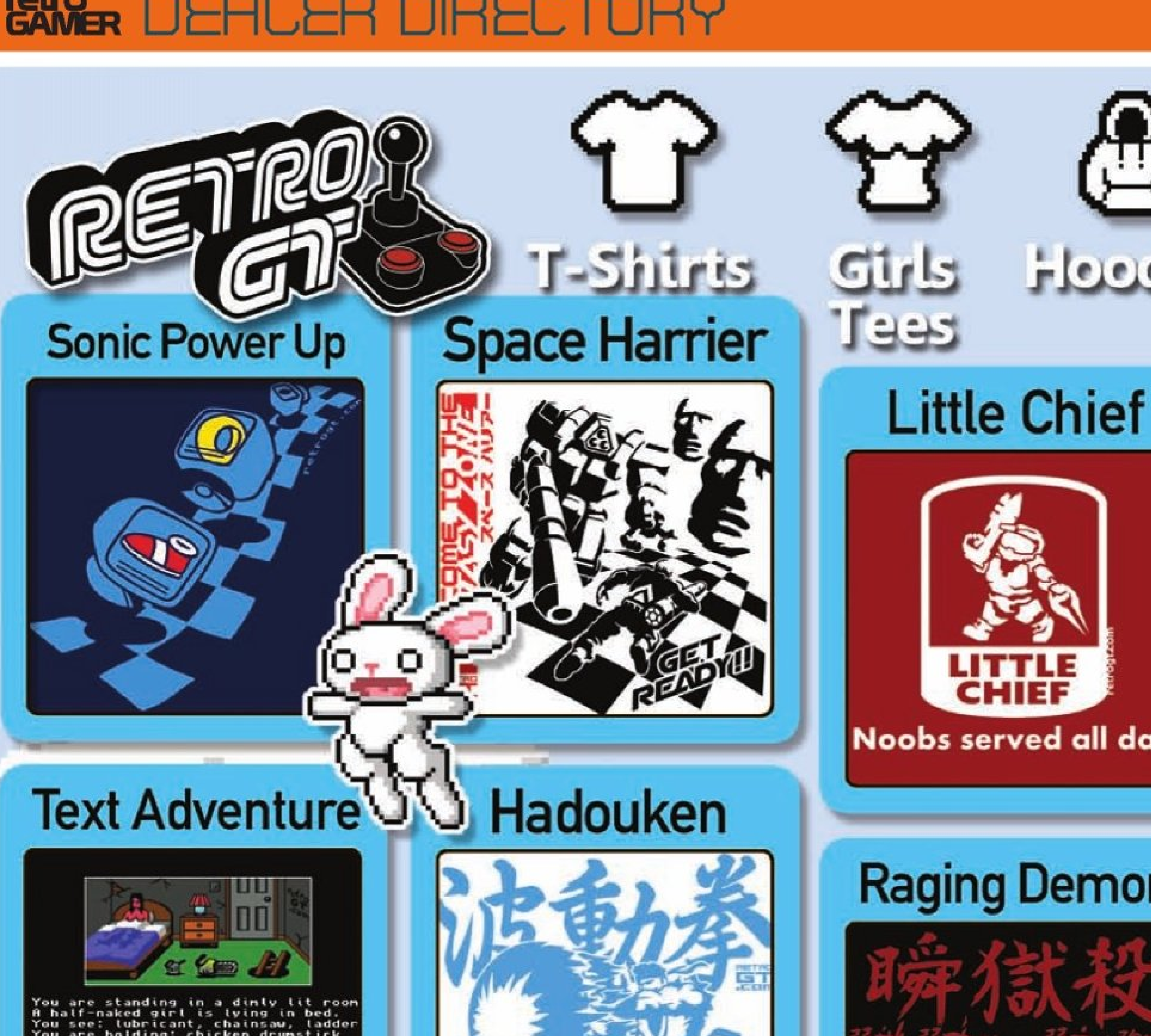
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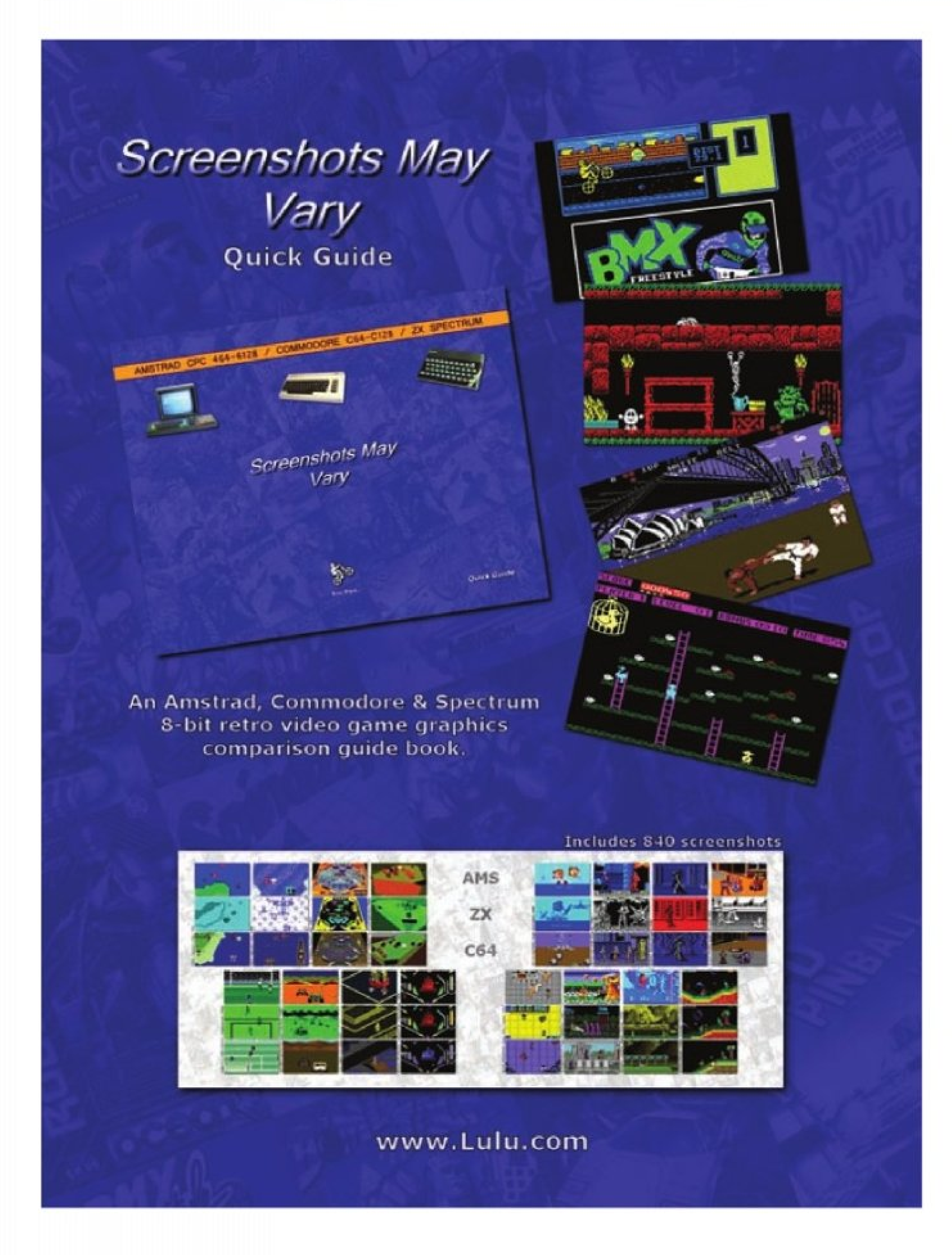
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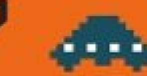
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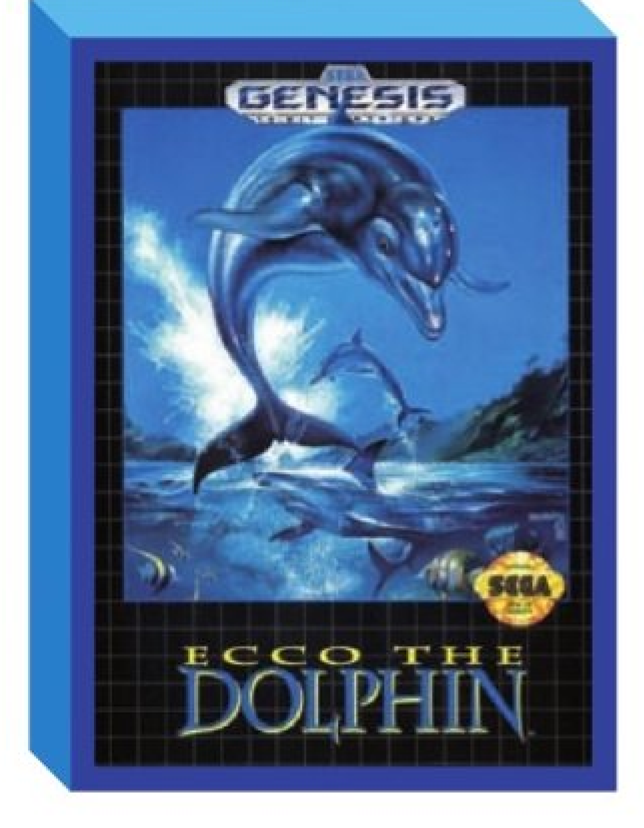
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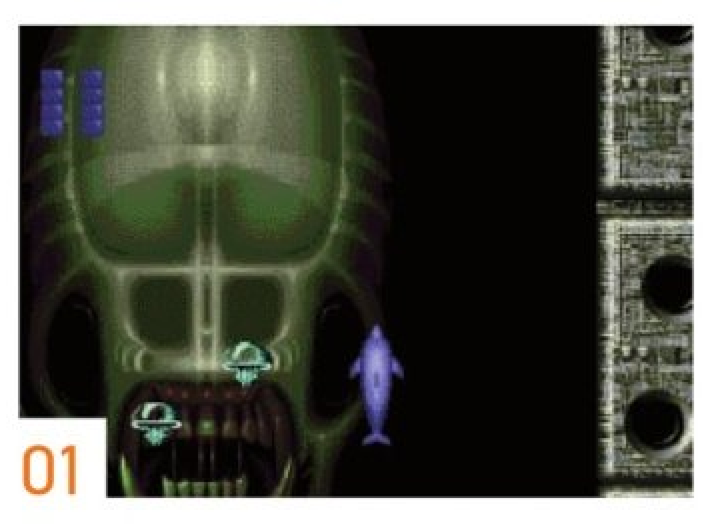


ENDGAME



ECCO THE DOLPHIN

» For a game about a young dolphin trying to solve the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of his missing pod, Ecco The Dolphin certainly pulled the rug from beneath gamers. What begins as an enchanting underwater simulator quickly turns into one of the most punishing games on the Mega Drive, and ends with one of gaming's most terrifying boss fights.



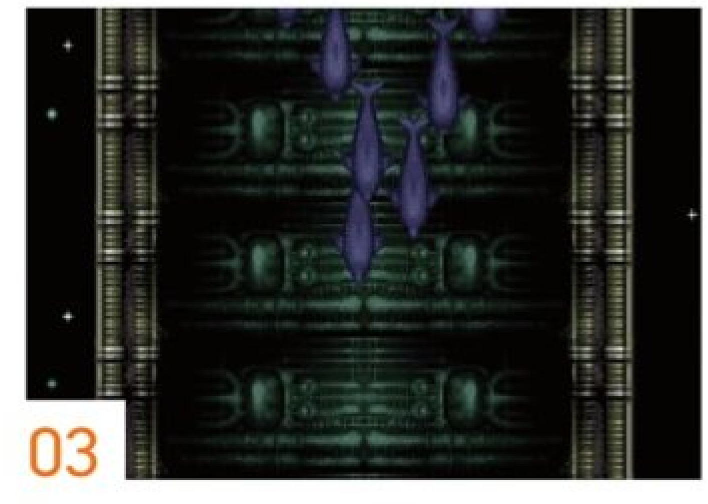
01

» Following its appearance in *Atomic Runner* last month, the Xenomorph makes another cameo. The tornado that sucked Ecco's friends from the sea was actually an alien vacuum. Let's hope these ETs aren't the blowhole-probing sort.



02

» After blinding the alien with his sonar and knocking its lower jaw away, the beast retreats, vomiting Ecco's pals up as it exits through the floor. It seems they enjoy dolphin meat as much as a Colonial Marine steak. Is any mammal safe?



03

» During their escape, Ecco pushes his pals to find out what happened. Earth is days away from being destroyed by an asteroid, and the aliens were merely saving the dolphins from extinction by giving them their own water planet.



04

» Annoyed by Ecco's worthless heroism, relationships inside the pod become testy. A big rift occurs as the pod continues to swim in the same location as in the intro, hoping that the alien isn't dead and decides to do a spot of species vacuuming again.



05

» With the asteroid due to hit at any time, the pod put their differences aside and enjoy their remaining days together. Like the Millennium Bug, days pass without so much as heavy rain. Maybe it was just an evil rumour started up by the aliens.


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